

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Approved in S  
June 27, 1968

Memorandum of Conversation

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PART I of III

DATE: June 20, 1968  
TIME: 3:45 to 4:55 p.m.  
PLACE: Secretary's Office

SUBJECT: Viet-Nam

PARTICIPANTS: ROMANIA: Alexandru Birladeanu, Deputy Prime Minister of Romania  
Corneliu Bogdan, Romanian Ambassador to the United States  
Mihai Croitoru, Third Secretary, Romanian Embassy (Interpreter)

U.S.: Secretary Rusk  
Walter J. Stoessel, Deputy Assistant Secretary  
for European Affairs  
George R. Kaplan, EUR/EE

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Introducing the discussion on Viet-Nam, which occupied most of the Secretary's meeting with him, Deputy Premier Birladeanu said that a conclusion in Viet-Nam would "categorically" improve the world atmosphere and bilateral relations. He said that the key to Viet-Nam is in U.S. hands and asked whether it would be more advantageous to the U.S. to have a really independent North Viet-Nam or to force its dependence on foreign (Chinese) aid, thereby losing its latitude and independence. Birladeanu said that he could not understand the U.S. view.

The Secretary replied that the U.S. had no desire to infringe on North Viet-Nam's independence and that we are prepared to recognize the basic interest of the socialist countries in North Viet-Nam. They, for their part, however, should recognize our interest in what happens in South Viet-Nam.

The Secretary reviewed the general situation in Asia in light of aggressive North Vietnamese intentions. He said that it was not simply a question of the 40-plus North Vietnamese regiments in South Viet-Nam and the greatly accelerated infiltration rate in April and May. No sooner had the North Vietnamese delegation arrived in Paris than a new North Vietnamese division arrived in South Viet-Nam. In Laos, the Secretary said, there are 40,000 North Vietnamese troops. Northern Thailand is being increasingly infiltrated by guerillas trained in North Viet-Nam. Agents and arms from China are along Burma's northeastern frontier. India has within the past ten days publicized the presence of Chinese arms in Naga in northeastern India. Even Prince Sihanouk has complained about the "red Khmer." What we need, the Secretary said, is a mutual respect for the territory and social structure of the countries of Asia. The Secretary reminded Birladeanu that 80 percent of the land area and 90 percent of the population of North Viet-Nam are free from



bombing, although not one square kilometer of South Viet-Nam is free from terror and physical attack. Hanoi is immune while Saigon is under attack.

The Secretary expressed his appreciation for the private Romanian efforts to explore possibilities for peaceful settlement of the Viet-Nam conflict. He said that Deputy Foreign Minister Macovescu had displayed integrity and high professional competence and that we have great respect for his efforts.

Birladeanu noted this and reminded the Secretary that Premier Maurer had made similar efforts in Hanoi even before Macovescu. Turning to the Paris talks, he said that the North Vietnamese had come to Paris against the will of the Chinese and that a failure to conclude a successful negotiation would confirm and strengthen the Chinese position. He said that, although the North Vietnamese willingly accept Romanian assistance, they are uncommunicative, and the Romanians therefore are uninformed both on the Paris talks themselves and on any private conversations that may have been held. Birladeanu asked the Secretary whether U.S. bombing would stop in the event of a reduction of North Vietnamese infiltration.

The Secretary stated that we needed some kind of response from Hanoi and would be prepared, if such a response were to materialize, to do more than our share to bring peace to Viet-Nam. He recalled to Birladeanu's attention President Johnson's speech of March 31, particularly those portions reiterating the U.S. position that we would take further steps to de-escalate if a sign is received from the other side. We have not listed the exact responses that we might issue in order that the door might be left open for Hanoi to consider a variety of responses. In Paris, the Secretary said, we have suggested demilitarizing the DMZ as well as other steps to reduce hostilities. We are probing to find what the North Vietnamese can agree to.

On a private basis and not for transmittal to the authorities in Hanoi, the Secretary told Birladeanu that we must, as a Government, be seriously concerned about the security of U.S. forces in combat. We cannot, for example, tell the U.S. Marines to wait until the enemy is within 2000 yards before shooting. At the same time, we cannot shoot at 6000 yards to the other side of the DMZ. The Secretary emphasized that these are not questions of ideology or polemics, but simply those necessarily raised by a Government with troops in the field.

The Secretary said that a peaceful settlement of the Viet-Nam conflict would not get very far if Hanoi thinks that we are fools or cowards; we are neither. We realize that the Hanoi authorities are tough, and we respect that. We also note that they are not cowards.

Birladeanu said that it is necessary for both sides to be both wise and tough. The Secretary replied that it is difficult to know sometimes what is wise.

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Birladeanu commented that he and his colleagues had admired the wisdom of the U.S. Government in the Cuban missile crisis. (He stated that what Khrushchev had done was without Romanian knowledge). He said that the U.S. had acted wisely in achieving its objectives without humiliating the other party.

The Secretary stated that in the U.S. mind there is a real connection between Viet-Nam and Cuba. If Khrushchev had not believed what President Kennedy had told him privately, we would have had general war. Now, if we accept Hanoi's position and in effect abandon South Viet-Nam, a gross miscalculation that could lead to general war could be made in Moscow and Peking. Birladeanu agreed, adding that such an action on our part would be interpreted as weakness in those capitals.

The Secretary reiterated that the U.S. is prepared to recognize the interest of the socialist countries in North Viet-Nam. We have no desire to drive Hanoi into the arms of Peking nor did we want to drop one bomb on North Viet-Nam. In fact, we waited five years before dropping the first. The Secretary said that we have tried to make clear to the North Vietnamese that, if their troops leave, ours will, too. We recognize that the North Vietnamese probably have some doubts about this, particularly when they consider what we have done to build up a major facility at Cam Ranh Bay. What they do not understand is that we can waste a billion dollars. Meanwhile, the Secretary stated, our Allies in the Far East cannot understand why we are not bombing Hanoi at a time when Saigon is under attack.

The Secretary noted our continuing interest in any possible channel for making progress towards peace. We want very much to know, he said, what would happen if we ceased the bombing.

Birladeanu replied that the authorities in North Viet-Nam are not at all eager to receive advice from Romania and said that the Romanians would not intervene.

The Secretary stated that we cannot ignore the practical problems that arise daily and cannot escape certain questions. We would welcome a serious discussion with the North Vietnamese on ways of reducing violence.

Birladeanu asked whether the North Vietnamese had rejected such discussions up to the present.

Emphasizing the delicacy of the situation in Paris, the Secretary said that the general North Vietnamese attitude during the past seven days appears to have changed slightly in that they have not yet replied to certain questions we have raised. We do not know whether they are giving further thought to these questions.

Birladeanu emphasized that the world was hoping for progress in Paris but that a certain disillusionment had begun to set in because there had been no evidence of progress there. He thanked the Secretary for the information on the Paris talks.

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The Secretary stated that he did not desire to create false hopes and that it is still too early to have any real idea of the direction of the talks. He said that the coffee breaks, at least, had recently become longer.

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