

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE/EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY

VIA GUAY CHANNEL

December 6, 1972

DELIVER IMMEDIATELY

TO: COLONEL GUAY

FROM: COLONEL KENNEDY *KK*

TO: GENERAL HAIG

FOR: DR. KISSINGER

The following is a message from the President  
to Dr. Kissinger:

BEGIN TEXT:

After reading all your messages, I am again, enormously impressed by  
the skillful and dedicated way that you're handling a terribly difficult situation.

Before a decision of this importance is made, it is imperative that I talk with  
you personally. To accomplish this goal, I suggest that you start tomorrow's  
session by saying that the President has read all of your message and a full  
transcript of the conversations to date. He is, frankly, shocked by the total  
intransigence of the North Vietnamese and particularly by the fact that they  
have backed off of the commitments they made in the meeting of October 26.

Then, I want you to go down a list of specific questions on all of the proposals  
that are contained in our minimum position contained in your last message  
adding to it the specific question about whether they will agree to any language  
covering the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam. I  
assume that their answers to virtually all of these questions will be negative,  
but the purpose is to make the record clear once and for all.

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I then want you to ask them what is their final offer.

You will then tell them that you will report the answers they have given to the President directly and then you will contact them as to the time and the conditions for further meetings.

I am totally convinced that our breaking off the negotiations by making a demand for them to withdraw their forces from South Vietnam which we know in advance they will reject, would be a disastrous error on our part. If the negotiations are to be broken off, it must be absolutely clear that they were responsible for breaking off the negotiations rather than we.

I also am firmly convinced that we should not paint ourselves into a corner by saying anything like "this is our last offer," or "this is our final meeting." Leave a crack of the door open for further discussion. You can indicate, of course, that the offer you are making which should be Option I of your last message to me, is the only one you believe I will approve, but beyond that, I would not indicate that this is the final offer and that if they don't take it you're going to break off negotiations and that they will have to take the consequences of military activity.

I want you to give them every opportunity to accept the first option of your last message to me. I agree with you that the possibility of their accepting it is quite remote, but they should be given every opportunity to accept it or reject it.

But what is absolutely imperative is that we are not put into a position where we break off the talks - that will play directly into their hands and will be fatally damaging to our domestic position in this country. I realize that you think that if I go on television that I can rally the American people to support an indefinite continuation of the war simply for the purpose of getting our prisoners back. I would agree that this is a possibility at this time. But, that can wear very thin within a matter of weeks - particularly as the propoganda organs - not only from North Vietnam, but in this country, begin to hammer away at the fact that we had a much better deal in hand, and then because of Saigon's intransigence, we were unable to complete it.

On the broader subjects which you and I must discuss at length when we meet, but where a decision does not have to be made right now, we have to weigh the option of taking the heat for massively increased bombing for 8 months for the limited purpose of getting our prisoners back. This action carries with it the high possibility that South Vietnam, in that period, will collapse due to the fact that we may well have the Congress, despite all our efforts, cut off

military and economic assistance to Saigon as the story unfolds that Saigon's intransigence was really the cause for the break up of the talks.

As against that option, we must weigh a course of action in which at its worst we would simply decide what was necessary to offer the North Vietnamese to get our prisoners back now and get out now and take the risk of the collapse of Saigon occurring now, rather than waiting until later. This is something we will of course do everything we can to prevent. Whether continuing the bombing for the sole purpose of getting our prisoners back is going to be worth the cost in terms of what it will do to our relations with the Congress, to our support in the country, domestically, and to our relations with the Chinese and the Russians, are also factors that we have to consider.

However your meeting comes out today, if it does not end in a settlement, and of course I know and agree with you that there is a very remote possibility that you will make a breakthrough on the settlement side, we will embark on a very heavy bombing program in the North. But we are going to do it without a dramatic television announcement of it. The thing to do here is to take the heat from the Washington establishment, who know the difference, for stepping up the bombing which will occur for a few days, and simply act strongly without escalating publicity about our actions by what we say about them.

END TEXT

Warm regards.

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