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LUKE STEWART
Independent Scholar

**The Unauthorized Diplomat:
Staughton Lynd, Vietnam War Diplomacy,
and a Missed “Missed Opportunity”
in the Peace Offensive,
December 1965 to January 1966**

Keywords: Vietnam War, Lyndon Johnson, Ho Chi Minh, bombing pause, informal diplomacy

ABSTRACT

Most diplomatic historians conclude that the failure of the Johnson administration’s second bombing pause over North Vietnam and first major peace offensive from December 25, 1965 to January 31, 1966 was a *fait accompli*. Moreover, the resumption of bombing was ordered without major debate within the national security state. “The Unauthorized Diplomat” challenges this interpretation by exploring the aftermath of the

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American peace activist and scholar Staughton Lynd's ten-day fact-finding trip to North Vietnam and discussions with representations of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the National Liberation Front (NLF) in Prague, Moscow, and Hanoi. Ultimately, Lynd's experiences throughout 1965 and his conversations with "the other side" during the peace offensive convinced him that alternatives to escalation existed in January 1966 and, unbeknownst to him, were reflected in the high-level deliberations and decision-making in the White House. This was perhaps the last best chance to avoid even greater U.S. escalation of the Vietnam War.

It was a tense atmosphere at the Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C. on the evening of January 24, 1966. Staughton Lynd, the Yale historian who recently returned from a ten-day fact-finding mission to Hanoi, was giving a much-anticipated talk sponsored by Women Strike for Peace (WSP) on his findings in North Vietnam and the prospects for peace in the Vietnam War. Speculation was rife that President Lyndon Johnson was going to resume bombing North Vietnam any day, thus ending the United States government's much vaunted second bombing pause of the war and first major peace offensive. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents in attendance, recording that evening's talk for its ongoing criminal investigation of Lynd's trip, the event's organizers quickly had to organize a second session to accommodate the roughly nine hundred attendees who eagerly waited to hear the young professor.¹

While Lynd gave numerous speeches during January 1966 and wrote just as many articles about the negotiating position of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the National Liberation

¹ Intelligence Report, January 25, 1966, Staughton Lynd FBI File No.100-HQ-396916 (hereafter Lynd FBI File).



Front of South Vietnam (NLF) as it related to the peace offensive, this talk dealt with a number of controversies which led him to conclude that “if the ‘peace offensive’ stops now it will rightly be regarded as a public relations maneuver” by the Vietnamese, the U.S. peace movement and world opinion. Instead, if the United States truly wanted peace in Vietnam, Lynd insisted that the Johnson administration must:

- a. Continue the bombing pause indefinitely, to give the DRV and NLF time to digest the United States’ initiative.
- b. Clarify this initiative by military de-escalation in South Vietnam as well as North Vietnam.
- c. Unequivocally declare its readiness to talk directly with the National Liberation Front about the concrete political circumstances under which the United States would withdraw its troops from Vietnam.²

These demands were gleaned from Lynd’s discussions with DRV and NLF representatives in Prague, Moscow, and Hanoi. As he pointed out since returning to the United States on January 9, there was “a deep inconsistency” in the U.S. position which called for peace in Vietnam but chastened the Vietnamese revolutionaries for committing aggression in their own country. According to Lynd, the North Vietnamese simply did not take the Johnson’s administration’s peace offensive seriously because the president pledged “to stay in Vietnam” as U.S. and allied offensive military operations continued in South Vietnam and new U.S. troops arrived bringing the total from 184,000 in December 1965 to 197,000 by the end of January 1966. Most importantly, Lynd challenged U.S. officials who traveled the world

² Staughton Lynd, “What Should the United States Do in Vietnam?” A Speech at the Washington Hilton Hotel, January 24, 1966, Series 2, Box 6, Folder 20, Staughton Lynd Collection, Kent State University, Special Collections and Archives, Kent, Ohio (hereafter SLC, KSU-SCA).

speaking of peace while refusing to recognize the NLF. This was perhaps the major stumbling block to peace at this critical juncture.³

As seen from Washington, “the Lynd-line” was simply unacceptable and eerily close to dovish senators on Capitol Hill. With a flurry of national security meetings held in the White House as the bombing pause entered its fifth week, Lynd’s criticism touched a nerve as the Johnson administration debated whether to resume bombing. Hitting all the major impediments the administration faced, Lynd’s fact-finding mission to Hanoi and peace activism was exposing the weakness of Washington’s position. Responding to the *Washington Post*’s coverage of Lynd’s Washington Hilton speech, Jack Valenti, special adviser to President Johnson, was adamant that the administration had to prove that Hanoi failed to respond to the peace offensive and that they continued sending troops and supplies to South Vietnam. If they could not provide the evidence, “the doves, the Lynd-liners and the [*New York Times*] will shriek.” For Valenti, if the president waited any longer to resume bombing “the Lynd-liners” demands, “like lava pouring over a volcano,” will overtake the debate. Without the pressure of the bombing, the administration would have to accept the North Vietnamese Four Points, released in April 1965, and respond to the growing demands by key senators and others advocating for an enclave strategy whereby a small coterie of U.S. soldiers would hold key positions in the South until negotiations and free elections were over. “There is no easy way out,” Valenti counseled the president. “We can never achieve a settlement that is honorable until we have demonstrated to the VC [Vietcong] and Hanoi they can’t win—and we

³ Staughton Lynd and Thomas Hayden, January 9, 1966, Statement at Kennedy Airport on return to the United States, “In Hanoi . . . The Peace That is Not Offensive,” *Viet Report*, January 1966, 3-6.



are hurting them.”⁴ By this point, President Johnson did not need any convincing that the bombing needed to be resumed. However, even as late as January 27, the president expressed concern to his aides that “I don’t think we have the case made to resume bombing” facing the outside pressures of the media, the doves in Congress, and growing calls from the peace movement to extend the bombing pause.⁵

The irony is that while Valenti and the majority of the president’s principal advisors were advocating for resumption of bombing during this critical week, the substantive discussions in the White House and State Department all contained the kernels of peace key to ending the war in Vietnam. This five-week period was perhaps the most important opportunity to avoid further escalation of the conflict and it was initiated by the Johnson administration when they paused the bombing of North Vietnam for thirty-seven days and contacted at least 115 countries in order to show the world it was interested in peace in Vietnam. In late-December 1965, there were still relatively few U.S. troops in South Vietnam compared to one year later and the bombing campaigns were similarly restrained both in the South and the North. With the bombing paused, although U.S. military operations continued in South Vietnam and Laos, this was perhaps the last moment to stave off greater escalation of the conflict as U.S. officials maintained they sought “unconditional discussions” with

⁴ Jack Valenti to Lyndon Johnson, January 25, 1966, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1998), Document 42, pp. 139-140. For media reports, see: “Johnson Prodded on Peace by Lynd,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1966, 4; and “Lynd Urges Talks with Viet ‘Front,’” *Washington Post*, January 25, 1966, 7.

⁵ Notes of Meeting, January 27, 1966, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, Folder January 27, 1966 - 8:20 p.m. Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisors on Resumption of Bombing, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library [hereafter LBJL].

Hanoi to find a settlement to the conflict. When Johnson and his advisers concluded that bombing should resume, they fashioned their response by putting the failure of the peace offensive squarely on the shoulders of Hanoi claiming it was not seriously responding to their overtures.

Most historical accounts of the failure of the peace offensive and the resumption of bombing treat it as a *fait accompli* which was decided without significant debate. Both the United States and the North Vietnamese are placed on equal footing and cast as equally responsible for the failure of the peace offensive. “The preponderant forces on both sides still hoped to attain mutually incompatible aims through fighting, and thus they viewed any enemy tendencies toward compromise as signs of weakness justifying more military efforts rather than reciprocal concessions to promote peace,” diplomatic historian James Hershberg concludes of the affair.⁶ In a compelling and exhaustive study of diplomatic missed opportunities during the war, Hershberg concludes the December 1965–January 1966 bombing pause was not one of them. Despite this failure, he brilliantly explores the efforts of Polish diplomats during the bombing pause to contact Hanoi, at the encouragement and blessing of U.S. special envoy Averell Harriman in Warsaw on December 29, 1965, during a series of meetings by Polish emissary Jerzy Michalowski with top Democratic Republic of Vietnam officials in early–January 1966. This included a meeting with Ho Chi Minh on January 6. Until Hershberg’s account, and the availability of documents from Poland and other communist countries, the only other initiative which is considered a serious U.S. effort at peace was the

⁶ James Hershberg, *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 65.

secret low-level direct contact codenamed PINTA which began on December 29, 1965, in Rangoon, Burma.⁷

The emerging body of scholarship on DRV and NLF diplomacy demonstrates that there was a power struggle within the DRV Politburo between those advocating a protracted war strategy seeking military victory and those forces seeking a diplomatic settlement with the United States. By December 1965, the forces allied around Le Duan, the first-secretary of the Lao Dong (the Vietnamese Workers' Party), had won the debate with Resolution 12 at the Party's Twelfth Plenum in December 1965.⁸ However, these accounts do not focus on the DRV's response to the peace offensive and several questions remain unanswered about how the DRV leadership responded to the Johnson administration. Nonetheless, the adoption of the protracted war strategy which combined military as well as diplomatic maneuvering helps explain the steadfastness of the DRV's position it publicly presented in its Foreign Ministry's statement on January 4 and Ho Chi Minh's letter to heads of state on January 24. There are valid questions whether the North Vietnamese would have agreed to negotiations at

⁷ George C. Herring, ed., *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983), 116-158.

⁸ English-language scholars have begun using an array of Vietnamese archival sources exploring aspects of DRV and NLF diplomacy. See for instance: Pierre Asselin, *Vietnam's American War: A History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Pierre Asselin, "'We Don't Want a Munich': Hanoi's Diplomatic Strategy, 1965-1968," *Diplomatic History* 36, No.3 (June 2012): 547-81; Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Robert S. McNamara, James G. Blight, and Robert K. Brigham, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999); Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Vietnam War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

this point in late-January 1966 if their key demands were agreed to by Washington in advance: an unconditional end to the bombing of North Vietnam, the cessation of military activities in South Vietnam, and the acceptance the DRV's Four Points of April 1965.⁹

Given the far-flung diplomatic maneuvering of late-December 1965 and January 1966, Staughton Lynd's peace activism and unauthorized diplomacy during the Johnson administration's peace offensive is largely unexplored by diplomatic historians.¹⁰ While Lynd's trip to North Vietnam is discussed in the expanding literature on the antiwar movement, there is no detailed examination of the effects of

⁹ "Statement by Spokesman of DRV Foreign Ministry on So-Called Peace Efforts Made Recently by the United States," Hanoi VNA International Service in English 1749Z, January 4, 1966, reproduced in "Pinta-Rangoon (the Second U.S. Bombing Pause), December 24, 1965-January 31, 1966," Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force [hereafter *The Official Pentagon Papers*], Part VI.C.1, Settlement of the Conflict, History of Contacts, Negotiations, 1965-1966, pp. 120-122; and, "Text of Ho Chi Minh's Letter on Peace Conditions," *New York Times*, January 29, 1966, 2.

¹⁰ Staughton Lynd's unauthorized diplomacy during the peace offensive is omitted in the major works on Vietnam War diplomacy. The notable exceptions are Melvin Small, "Who Gave Peace a Chance? LBJ and the Antiwar Movement," in *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964-1968*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 89-90; and, a passing reference in David Kraslow and Stuart Loory, *The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1968), 12 (FN12). Henry Kissinger glibly refers to Lynd and Tom Hayden as "two pilgrims to Hanoi" when discussing the challenges to the Cold War anti-communist consensus which emerged in the 1960s. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1994), 668. For broader works on Vietnam War diplomacy, see: Hershberg, *Marigold*; Gardner and Gittinger, eds., *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964-1968*; George C. Herring, "Fighting Without Allies: The International Dimensions of America's Failure in Vietnam," in *Why The North Won the Vietnam War*, ed. Marc Jason Gilbert (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 77-96; Robert S. McNamara, James G. Blight, and Robert K. Brigham, *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999); George C. Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam: A Different Kind of War* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994); Herring, ed., *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War*; and, Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1968* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979).



Lynd's efforts on the peace offensive. Outside of the official state-sanctioned diplomacy during the Vietnam War and select case studies, the connections between the U.S. and international peace movement with Vietnamese revolutionaries is relegated to scholarship on the antiwar movement and the excellent work by scholars focusing on Vietnamese's people's diplomacy.¹¹ As these scholars demonstrate, the U.S. and international peace movement emerged as a powerful force in the diplomatic arena during the war. With the shared goal of ending the war in Vietnam, the connections between the Vietnamese revolutionaries and the peace movement were maligned by the U.S. national security state and the mainstream media. However, this large network of connections became a potent force to be reckoned with on the international stage as the DRV and the NLF recognized the peace movement in the United States as an important constituency to communicate with in order to help end the war in Vietnam.

The Unauthorized Diplomat pulls these different threads together—U.S.-Vietnamese state-to-state diplomacy, Vietnamese people's diplomacy with the U.S. peace movement, media reporting of these issues, and its impact on the Johnson administration—to explore

¹¹ There is an excellent and growing body of scholarship on Vietnamese "people's diplomacy" during the Vietnam War. In particular, see: Harish C. Mehta, *People's Diplomacy of Vietnam: Soft Power in the Resistance War* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019); Jessica M. Frazier, *Women's Antiwar Diplomacy During the Vietnam War Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "Revolutionary Circuits: Toward Internationalizing America in the World," *Diplomatic History* 39, No. 3 (June 2015): 411-422; Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), and Mary Hershberger, *Traveling to Vietnam: American Peace Activists and the War* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998). For a more detailed discussion of Lynd's trip to Vietnam, see Carl Mirra, *The Admirable Radical: Staughton Lynd and Cold War Dissent, 1945-1970* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2010), Chapter 5: "Mission to Hanoi: Knocking on the Other Side's Door."

this interplay and the alternatives to escalation of the conflict which Lynd publicized throughout January 1966 and after.



Staughton Lynd near the city of Nam Dinh inspecting U.S. bombing damage during his ten-day trip to North Vietnam (December 1965-January 1966). Foreground (Left to Right): Do Xuan Oanh, interpreter and member of Vietnam Peace Committee, and Staughton Lynd. Background: unidentified Vietnamese guide with American historian Herbert Aptheker. Photograph by the courtesy of Staughton and Alice Lynd. Photograph restored by Eric Kerl.

It should be noted that Lynd was one of the first to popularize the argument, and perhaps the strongest proponent in the U.S., that the peace offensive was a public relations maneuver. As this is one of the central debates in the literature, it is noteworthy that Lynd's arguments have lacked attention. By taking this approach, Lynd appears on the same dance floor as U.S. officials and Vietnamese diplomats, sometimes taking center stage and at other times shuffling into the background as we explore the internal debates of the Johnson administration. With a nuanced eye towards the possibilities for peace



discussed within the White House and State Department in response to activists such as Lynd, one of the central arguments here is that the end of the peace offensive and escalation of the conflict was not a *fait accompli* and the opportunity for peace, which President Johnson and his advisors created, was squandered when the bombing was prematurely resumed on January 31, 1966. While one could argue that the DRV had chosen victory on the battlefield instead of around the conference table by December 1965, the reality was that in January 1966 there were lines of communication open between Washington and Hanoi which could have been pursued through an extension of the bombing halt and, as Lynd argued, discussions about the thorny issues at the heart of Vietnam War diplomacy could be deepened. At the time and since, Lynd was criticized as naïve, a communist dupe, or even a traitor.¹² However, unless the United States was prepared to stay in South Vietnam as it had done in South Korea, the DRV's three key demands elucidated above could only be ignored for so long. The point is this: Hanoi did not resume bombing; Washington did, and this had disastrous consequences for both sides. This was a missed opportunity to de-escalate the conflict.

Interestingly for our purposes, the Johnson administration paid close attention to its critics and had to respond to the accusations made

¹² While there is no space to discuss the attacks launched against Lynd in the media, by Yale's President Kingman Brewster, and by members of Congress, it is nonetheless important to recognize them. William F. Buckley, Jr. was perhaps Lynd's most ardent critic at the time, calling for "social sanctions" against Lynd and an "idiot" on his new television show *Firing Line*. Among the numerous examples to cite, see for instance: Kingman Brewster, "Statement to the NEWS," *Yale Daily News*, January 19, 1966; William F. Buckley Jr., "The Prof's Trip," *Providence Journal*, January 19, 1966; "Vietnam: What Next?" with Staughton Lynd, *Firing Line*, May 23, 1966, Program 011, Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Stanford University. These themes were discussed in Paul Hollander's *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 4-6, 270-271.

by Lynd as reported in the press. Lyndon Johnson maintained in his memoirs that people like Lynd and the great number of “self-appointed ‘mediators’” and “free-lance ‘peacemakers’ [...] may have harmed more than they helped” the diplomatic situation because “they often did more to confuse the issues than to clarify them.”¹³ This analysis will demonstrate that Lynd’s attempts to publicize “the other side’s” negotiating position ended up illuminating the very constraints the Johnson administration faced in pursuing the resumption of bombing after it abandoned its peace offensive at the beginning of its third week. For Lynd, the realization that the war would be escalated after the failure of the bombing pause helped the antiwar leader realign his outlook for appropriate direct actions to take in trying to end the war throughout 1966 and 1967.

Despite the large body of scholarship and declassified documents from various archives about this crucial moment in the war, an exploration of Staughton Lynd’s peace activism and unauthorized diplomacy with the Vietnamese revolutionaries, and the Johnson administration’s reaction, points to several questions left unanswered about the pause. While the North Vietnamese maintained that its Four Points of April 1965 were simply restatements of the 1954 Geneva Accords, the United States refused to accept them as presented and publicly argued that Hanoi was simply inflexible. First, the question of U.S. troop withdrawals in Point One would emerge in private conversations several times throughout 1965 in the secret diplomacy of the XYZ low-level unofficial channel,¹⁴ in the public pronouncements in

¹³ Lyndon B. Johnson, *Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 249–250.



late-August 1965 of former British Labour MP Lord Fenner Brockway,¹⁵ and in December 1965 with the Giorgio La Pira/Amintore Fanfani affair.¹⁶ The crucial question remained: did the DRV demand that U.S. troops be withdrawn from South Vietnam *before* negotiations or whether a system of phased withdrawals would suffice? Second, and even more controversially, the DRV's Point Three was simply unacceptable to the United States as stated: "The internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves, in accordance with the programme of the South Vietnamese National Front for Liberation, without any foreign interference." What did the DRV mean by this point? What were they willing to accept in order to move to the negotiating table?

For Lynd, these were the most significant questions he hoped to clarify in his discussions with the Vietnamese. However, as the peace offensive was underway two other questions emerged from Lynd's experience which he formulated throughout January and after in his speeches and articles. First, what did it mean to talk directly with the Vietnamese? Did the United States have direct channels of communication open with the DRV and NLF? When it was disclosed

¹⁴ For more on the XYZ channel, see: *The Official Pentagon Papers*, Part VI.C.1, pp. 68-107; McNamara, Blight and Brigham, *Argument Without End*, pp. 269-273; and Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, pp. 98-99.

¹⁵ "'Concession' is Reported," *New York Times*, August 22, 1965, 3; "A Shift by Hanoi on Talks is Seen," *New York Times*, August 22, 1965, 3; "Easing of Terms Denied by Hanoi," *New York Times*, August 25, 1965, 2; and "Diplomats Believe Hanoi Wants to Keep Way Open for Talks," *New York Times*, August 26, 1965, 3.

¹⁶ Richard Dudman, "Nov. 2 Hanoi Peace Move Reported Rejected by U.S.," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 17, 1965, 1; John D. Pomfret, "'Overture' Relayed by Italian Visitors," *New York Times*, December 18, 1965, 1; "Texts of Letters from Fanfani and Rusk," *New York Times*, December 18, 1965, 3; Max Frankel, "Hanoi Disavows a Peace Feeler," *New York Times*, December 19, 1965, 1; and, "Text of Hanoi's Disavowals," *New York Times*, December 19, 1965, 3. See also: Hershberg, *Marigold*, pp. 16-20.

that there was passing of notes in Rangoon on December 29, Lynd quickly condemned the Johnson administration for failure to talk with the NLF. Secondly, evidence emerged in the press that there was a decrease in large-scale North Vietnamese military attacks in South Vietnam during the peace offensive. Lynd argued that this was perhaps a signal from Hanoi to Washington that it was responding to the bombing pause. How did the Johnson administration respond to this information?

By examining Lynd's criticism of the peace offensive and with a careful re-reading of the already declassified record of meetings within the White House during this intense period of back-and-forth, I argue that the Johnson administration *chose* to resume bombing North Vietnam despite the fact they knew real alternatives existed at the time. Without the knowledge of these highly sensitive internal discussions and decision making, Lynd attempted to make the case with the information he had at his disposal that there were clear alternatives to the resumption of bombing and the escalation of the war if the U.S. government was serious about peace in January 1966. Interestingly, Lynd touched on many of the impediments to the resumption of bombing which were being discussed behind closed doors. During the fourth and fifth week of the bombing pause, there was indeed a consensus about the need to resume bombing but there was a lively discussion about the constraints which emerged over January from "the Lynd-liners," the doves on Capitol Hill, the media and the actions of the Vietnamese revolutionaries. The important discussions centered around how to quickly close the direct and indirect channels which were open and how to interpret the decrease in large scale attacks by the North Vietnamese People's Army of Viet Nam (PAVN) and NLF's People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). Ultimately, each of these



issues could have been a foil to the carefully crafted peace offensive if it was public knowledge the administration decided to bomb with direct lines of communication to the DRV still open and with the recognition that there was a decrease in large-scale attacks in the South. Once the bombing resumed, President Johnson hardened his position and the war was inexorably escalated to appease the hawks in his administration and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) in order exact concessions from the Vietnamese communists in the North and the South through increased military attacks by land, air, and sea.

Crucially, from Staughton Lynd's point of view, informed by his close reading of the situation throughout 1965 and his first-hand accounts in North Vietnam, U.S. policymakers completely misunderstood and mischaracterized the conflict in Vietnam. Moreover, critics of the war, from moderate peace activists to liberal internationalists, fashioned peace proposals based on a U.S.-centric reading of international affairs. Outside of complete destruction of Vietnam, the United States could not win a military victory in Vietnam because the Vietnamese revolutionaries' slogan, as Lynd told the packed audience at Yale's Woolsey Hall on January 17, was "quite literally, 'liberty or death.'" Unlike the options before the American people, escalation or some middle path which included a ceasefire and negotiations combined with an enclave strategy, Lynd argued that the United States "must initiate and deepen direct contacts" with Hanoi and the NLF with the acceptance at a fundamental level the United States needed to decide "to withdraw" from Vietnam. These expanded direct communications, despite all the inherent difficulties, would inevitably bring forth clarifications of the key issues left unresolved or misunderstood. For the Vietnamese, as was hammered home to Lynd over the course of his discussions with various officials, this was a

conflict for national independence and self-determination whether it was against historical foes, the Chinese and Japanese during World War Two, or the French, and now the Americans.¹⁷

While this argument was considered naïve and Lynd's trip to North Vietnam anti-American and treasonous, it took more than two brutal years of conflict for Johnson to open formal talks in Paris with the North Vietnamese and seven years until the Paris Peace Accords were signed. Much American, Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian blood and treasure were expended during these disastrous years of conflict. By widening the lens of who is involved in the diplomatic history of the Vietnam War, this encounter between with the DRV and NLF, the Johnson administration, the media, and the nascent unauthorized diplomats of the American peace movements offers a more complete vantage point with which to read the internal deliberations of the Johnson administration throughout the latter part of January and especially the decision to resume bombing on January 31.

The Unauthorized Diplomat: Staughton Lynd and Vietnam War Negotiations in 1965

When the United States began its systematic bombing campaign over North Vietnam and landed its first combat troops in South Vietnam in early-March 1965, Staughton Lynd's attention was still on the civil rights movement. Now teaching U.S. history at Yale University, the thirty-six-year-old Lynd worked with his friend and fellow radical historian Howard Zinn at Spelman College, the historically African American women's college in Atlanta, Georgia, from 1961 to 1964.

¹⁷ Address of Professor Staughton Lynd at Woolsey Hall, Yale University, January 17, 1966, Series 2, Box 6, Folder 21, SLC, KSU-SCA.



During the Mississippi Freedom Summer, organized by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Lynd was invited to direct the Freedom Schools opened throughout the state. He was in Selma, Alabama, discussing the possibility of opening freedom schools there when he read about the NLF attacks on the U.S. airfield in Pleiku on February 7, 1965.¹⁸

Upon returning to Yale, students and faculty created the Ad Hoc Committee to Protest the War in Viet Nam and held an event on February 11 at Yale's Law School Auditorium, and a rally and march on February 13. Lynd spoke at both events, where he read aloud the Declaration of Conscience Against the Vietnam War, circulated by pacifist groups beginning in January which committed its signers to refusing to participate in any way with the war, the draft, and weapons manufacturing and distribution. Clarifying his remarks at these events in a letter to the editor of the *Yale Daily News*, Lynd argued: "In Vietnam the United States is fighting, not an external aggressor, but a revolutionary independence movement supported by a majority of the people."¹⁹ Moreover, the Johnson administration "escalated the war in Vietnam without exhausting the possibilities of negotiation, and without consulting or informing the American people." For these reasons, and in earnest, Lynd committed himself to near full-time opposition to the Vietnam War and quickly emerged as a leading voice of the radical wing of the peace movement in the United States and around the world.

¹⁸ Alice Lynd and Staughton Lynd, *Stepping Stones: Memoir of a Life Together* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 77.

¹⁹ Staughton Lynd, Letter to the Editor, *Yale Daily News*, February 18, 1965. There was considerable coverage of the two events, but for the specific article Lynd responded to, see: Boris M. Baczynskj, "Professors Condemn US Vietnam Policy: Critics Urge Withdrawal of Troops," *Yale Daily News*, February 12, 1965.

Lynd, a Quaker and a Marxist, explained his opposition to the Vietnam War in numerous speeches, debates and articles throughout 1965. The main elements of Lynd's opposition can briefly be summarized as follows. First, Lynd argued that the war represented a constitutional crisis which lacked a Congressional declaration of war and, up until February 1966, any serious debate in Congress. Moreover, he argued that the war was illegal under international law because it lacked sanction by the United Nations Security Council as outlined in the U.N. Charter. These facts, based in addition to the Nuremberg Judgement of 1945 and the Nuremberg Principles of 1950, led to the unavoidable conclusion that the United States launched a war of aggression against Vietnam. Taking as his starting point the failure of the 1954 Geneva Accords—which temporarily separated North and South Vietnam until elections could be held in 1956 as well as outlawed the use of foreign forces and military bases—Lynd challenged the Johnson administration's justification of the war that it was, in the words of the State Department's February 1965 White Paper, "aggression from the North." For Lynd, the use of U.S. military forces in South Vietnam and the escalation of the war in 1965 represented a national and international emergency, especially in the nuclear age, and required the use of nonviolent revolution through civil disobedience and direct action to stop it.²⁰

²⁰ See, for instance: Letter to the Editor, *Yale Daily News*, February 18, 1965; Remarks at Emergency Meeting on Vietnam, April 1, 1965, Carnegie Hall, New York City, Series 2, Box 6, Folder 20, SLC, KSU-SCA; "Staughton Lynd at Rally: The Dilemma of Americans," *National Guardian*, April 24, 1965; "Remarks at the Berkeley Teach-In," May 22, 1965, Series 2, Box 6, Folder 20, SLC, KSU-SCA; "Revolution and the Citizen's Moral Responsibility," Toronto International Teach-In, October 11, 1965, Series 2, Box 6, Folder 21, SLC, KSU-SCA; "Mr. Lynd on Vietnam," *Yale Daily News*, November 4, 1965; "Make Love Not War: The Campaign Against the Draft," *Liberation*, December 1965, 25; "An Exchange on Vietnam," *New York Review of Books*, December 23, 1965.



Secondly, Lynd and the radical peace movement more broadly, argued that since the United States had no lawful or moral authority to be in Vietnam the Johnson administration should immediately withdraw from South Vietnam and stop all acts of war in both the North and the South.²¹ This position differed starkly from the position of the moderate peace activists in groups such as the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) or individuals such as social democrats Irving Howe or Michael Harrington or Socialist Party leader Norman Thomas. According to these peace advocates, the United States should declare a ceasefire and open negotiations with the DRV and NLF. Those outside of the peace camp who did not consider themselves activists but moderate liberals, intellectuals such as Arthur Schlesinger, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Hans Morgenthau, Jr., advocated an “enclave strategy” wherein U.S. forces in South Vietnam would hold certain key strongholds in order to convince the Vietnamese communists that the Americans would not withdraw until there was an agreed upon peace settlement. The enclave strategy, while first proposed by Morgenthau, was popularized in a February 1966 *Harper’s* magazine article by retired Lieutenant General James Gavin. These moderate alternatives, for various reasons, all argued that the United States could not simply withdraw from Vietnam and was the cause of much acrimonious debate.²² For Lynd, his trip to Vietnam would only

²¹ “Inside the Quagmire,” *Viet-Report*, July 1965, 18–20; “Withdrawal in Return for Free Elections,” *New York Times*, September 5, 1965, E9; “Mr. Lynd on Vietnam,” *Yale Daily News*, November 4, 1965; and, “An Exchange on Vietnam,” *New York Review of Books*, December 23, 1965.

²² Hans Morgenthau, “The Options Before Us,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 27, 1965, reprinted in Morgenthau, *Vietnam and the United States* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1965), 79–80; Lt. Gen. (ret.) James Gavin, “A Communication on Vietnam,” *Harper’s*, February 1966, 16–20. For a full discussion, see: Howard Zinn, *Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967); and,

strengthen his belief that this was an unwinnable war and therefore the United States should seek to immediately withdraw.

The question of responsibility for the war in Vietnam, based in domestic and international law, and how best to end the conflict, meant for Lynd that there was no such equality between belligerents because the conflict was initiated by the United States. While the Vietnamese revolutionaries were responsible for the actions on the battlefield, and Lynd condemned alleged war crimes by both sides in the conflict, he nonetheless placed the burden of proof on the United States to demonstrate its claims that the DRV and NLF were responsible for the war and refused to negotiate an end to it. Key U.S. officials spent the whole of 1965 attempting to publicly argue that the responsibility for the war was the external aggression of the North Vietnamese and the internal aggression of the NLF against the separate and independent state of South Vietnam (the Republic of Viet Nam or the Government of Viet Nam). When President Johnson pronounced at Johns Hopkins University on April 7 that the United States was prepared to engage in “unconditional discussions,” Lynd wrote in the *New York Times*: “The President cannot expect North Vietnam to agree to negotiations while being bombed. Bombing is itself a formidable ‘condition.’ To hold out olive leaves while dropping bombs is to suggest not unconditional negotiation but unconditional surrender. Peace in Vietnam requires: (1) a willingness to deal directly with the Vietcong; (2) an end to bombing.”²³

Over the summer of 1965 when the Johnson administration spent a considerable amount of energy placing the burden of

Louis B. Zimmer, *The Vietnam War Debate: Hans J. Morgenthau and the Attempt to Halt the Drift into Disaster* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2011), Chapter 6.

²³ Staughton Lynd, “Civil War, Not Invasion,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1965.



negotiations on Hanoi, Lynd attempted to cut through the clutter by arguing that the positions of the United States and the DRV were not so far apart. One formulation, Lynd argued again in the *New York Times* was thus: “Could we not offer to negotiate directly with the N.L.F., suggesting that the United States would agree to a phased withdrawal of the American military presence in return for N.L.F. agreement to free elections under international supervision?”²⁴ The question of free elections in South Vietnam was an important issue and one which led to much speculation throughout 1965. At this point, Lynd did not yet know he would be traveling to Vietnam and, when the situation arose, this would be an important question he would seek to clarify.

As is mentioned above, considerable controversy swarmed around the negotiating positions of both the United States and the DRV in November and December 1965. Therefore, it is a coincidence of history that the Staughton Lynd, Tom Hayden, co-founder of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and Herbert Aptheker, historian and leading member of the Communist Party, USA, fact-finding trip to North Vietnam occurred at the same time the Johnson administration launched its first major peace offensive. The origins of the trip lay in Helsinki, Finland, where from July 10–15, 1965 Herbert Aptheker participated in the World Peace Congress (WPC). At this time, Aptheker and the youth wing of the CPUSA, the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs, were approached by members of the Peace Committee of North Vietnam and invited to travel to Hanoi. Aptheker was specifically asked by the Vietnamese to invite two other guests who were preferably non-communists, and this led him to invite Lynd in September. After some difficulty in getting a third traveler, Lynd asked Hayden when he was

²⁴ Staughton Lynd, “Withdrawal in Return for Free Elections,” *NYT*, September 5, 1965.

visiting New Haven if he wanted to join Aptheker and himself. The twenty-six-year-old agreed.²⁵

Departing on December 19, 1965 without the permission of the United States government and possibly in violation of Cold War travel restrictions to communist countries, the trio left New York's JFK International Airport for London, Prague, Moscow, Beijing, and finally Hanoi. Before leaving the United States, Lynd drafted a memorandum for Hayden and Aptheker entitled "Things Which Need Clarification About the N.L.F.-Hanoi Negotiating Position." For Lynd, there were two main issues: (1) the political future of South Vietnam as envisioned by the NLF, and, (2) whether the DRV demanded that the United States withdraw all troops from Vietnam before negotiations.²⁶ Before leaving the United States, Hayden and Lynd issued the following statement: "We have no assurance that we can add anything to American understanding of the other side's approach to peace. The recent bombing of Haiphong and the danger that this dreadful war may be further escalated, however, confirms us in the feeling that we should try."²⁷ Lynd also announced that he would be reporting his finding in *Viet-Report*, a new publication created in the Spring and Summer of 1965 devoted to critical reporting on the war, which provided considerable amounts of space for the interviews the trio conducted with the Vietnamese, and their own statements and analysis.

While Lynd preferred to consider himself a factfinder and not an unauthorized diplomat, the trip was part of the nascent effort by the

²⁵ Herbert Aptheker, *Mission to Hanoi* (New York: International Publishers, 1966), 12.

²⁶ Staughton Lynd and Tom Hayden, *The Other Side* (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1966), 110.

²⁷ John Corry, "Yale Professor is Visiting Hanoi," *The New York Times*, December 28, 1965, 1.



DRV to engage in what Ho Chi Minh called “people’s diplomacy.” Conceived during the independence struggle against the French beginning after 1945, the Vietnamese revolutionaries established information offices in several countries and sent delegations of unofficial diplomats to conferences to connect with various social and political movements in communist and non-communist countries in order to garner sympathy for the Vietnamese revolution and decolonization. Beginning in 1964, the DRV began in earnest to attract world attention to the growing struggle against the United States by sending Vietnamese delegations to various conferences to speak and interact with delegations from other countries. The result would be a massive effort on the part of many Western peace activists to make connections with Vietnamese revolutionaries at diplomatic missions in Paris, France, at various conferences held around the world in places like Britain, Canada, Sweden, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere throughout the war. Integral to “people’s diplomacy,” peace activists were invited, or requested the ability, to travel to North Vietnam. One of the most important individuals in this process was the British philosopher and mathematician, Bertrand Russell, who would go on to organize the International War Crimes Tribunal in 1967. Moreover, as Mary Hershberger demonstrates, over 200 American activists and intellectuals traveled to North Vietnam, and by 1969 an average of one American delegation was traveling to Vietnam per month.²⁸

After Robert McNamara proposed a second bombing pause on November 30, 1965, a nearly four-week debate amongst President Johnson and his senior advisors ensued over the merits of extending a 30-hour Christmas truce. President Johnson wrote in his memoirs that “the first weeks of December were a period of widespread diplomatic

²⁸ Mary Hershberger, *Traveling to Vietnam*, xv.

probing and of comprehensive debate and discussion at the highest levels of the administration.” Ultimately, the president had “grave doubts about a pause,” expressed in these meetings as a concern that it would send the wrong signal to Hanoi and allow them time to prepare militarily, that a pause would not win over dovish senators, and that there will be greater pressure to escalate the war if the pause failed.²⁹ In these meetings and in various memoranda there was a unanimous consensus that Hanoi would not respond positively to a temporary cessation of the bombing and that the groundwork needed to be laid to demonstrate to world and domestic opinion that the United States did all it could to bring Hanoi to the negotiating table. Ultimately on December 27, Johnson agreed to an extension of the bombing pause and this inaugurated the first “Peace Offensive.”³⁰ In conjunction with the peace offensive, Secretary of State Dean Rusk hastily prepared the U.S. government’s own Fourteen Point plan for peace which he described as putting “everything into the basket of peace except the surrender of South Vietnam.”³¹

In the early morning hours of December 28, Rusk informed the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., who was vehemently opposed to a bombing halt, why the United States was nonetheless extending it. Assuring Lodge that U.S. military

²⁹ Lyndon Johnson, *Vantage Point*, p. 235. The key meetings: December 7, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume III, Vietnam, June-December 1965*, Document 223; December 17, 1965, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, LBJL; December 18, 1965, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, LBJL; and, December 21, 1965, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, LBJL.

³⁰ Chester Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1970), 291; and, “Editorial Note,” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume III, Vietnam, June-December 1965*, Document 254, pp. 716-717.

³¹ Dean Rusk, “The Heart of the Matter in Viet-Nam,” December 27, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume III, Vietnam, June-December 1965*, Document 247, pp. 704-706.



operations—air, ground, and sea—would continue unabated in South Vietnam, “as well as air operations in Laos,” the secretary of state laid out the main reasons for the pause. As referenced numerous times during the month of December, the president and his advisors were concerned that the American people and the Congress needed “solid preparation” for an escalation of the war. Troop requests, which would increase from the current level of 184,000 to 440,000 by the end of 1966, and the Congressional appropriations request of \$18 billion for the war required a “clear demonstration that we have explored fully every alternative but that [the] aggressor has left us no choice.” Rusk then cited a recent Harris public opinion poll which demonstrated that 73 percent of Americans favored a ceasefire effort and that 59 percent favored a bombing pause. Within these numbers, 64 percent of Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater voters supported a ceasefire and 48 percent supported a bombing pause. However, if the pause or ceasefire were to fail, 61 percent of those polled supported an increase in bombing. Using these numbers, Rusk maintained that “they illustrate need to prepare our people for major sacrifices by making crystal clear where responsibility lies.” However, as Rusk conceded, the administration did not “anticipate that Hanoi will respond in any significant way.”³² The question can be asked about how sincere the administration was in finding peace if it did not expect the other side to agree to sit down to negotiate? Did the administration do everything in its power to end the war?

³² Dean Rusk to Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., December 28, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume III, Vietnam, June-December 1965*, Document 255, pp. 717-719.

Staughton Lynd and the Direct Contact Controversy

Staughton Lynd made front-page news in the United States on January 9, 1966, speaking from Moscow *en route* back to the United States after his ten-day factfinding mission in Hanoi. Challenging the basic premise of the Johnson administration's peace offensive, Lynd, referring to his ninety-minute conversation with DRV Premier Pham Van Dong on January 5, told reporters of the United States' "apparent failure to make direct contact" with the DRV and the NLF. In a prepared statement, read by Tom Hayden, the trio charged,

If the Administration is prepared to knock on all doors except those of the National Liberation Front and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the immediate parties to the conflict, then we must ask: Are the worldwide discussions now in process intended to seek out the basis for a settlement, or are they intended to prepare public opinion for new escalations?³³

In response to the newspaper coverage of the disclosure, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy wrote to the president that the claim was "false" as the U.S. had indeed made "contact with Hanoi." "It is not altogether clear to my brother [Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, William P. Bundy] and me that we have had as much of this kind of contact as we need, for the record. The Department has been reluctant to enlarge these contacts for fear of misunderstandings in Saigon," Bundy wrote. Nonetheless, the national

³³ Peter Grose, "Lynd Says Hanoi Denies Getting a Direct U.S. Bid," *New York Times*, January 9, 1966, 1.



security adviser informed the president that he would be looking into the matter later that day.³⁴

The question of direct contacts is important to understand whether the “Peace Offensive” was going to be successful or not. The U.S. government viewed direct contacts with Hanoi in two separate ways. First were direct U.S. to DRV diplomatic channels with official representatives of each government. This means that until the opening of the Paris peace talks in 1968, there were only low-level contacts between official representatives of each government, and this is symbolized with the Rangoon/PINTA channel which lasted from December 29, 1965 to February 21, 1966. On the other hand, there were third party representatives—usually from third countries—who received the blessing from Washington to engage in direct talks with the DRV on behalf of the United States. These direct channels tried to pass notes to Hanoi from the United States, or in the case of Poland during the “Peace Offensive” tried to directly convey to the Hanoi leadership that the United States was seeking to negotiate. There were numerous other third-party contacts by individuals, heads of state, politicians, or the U.N. Secretary General who attempted to open diplomatic channels which did not have the backing of Washington and, therefore, were unauthorized contacts. These issues were discussed at length in a July 1965 secret memorandum by William P. Bundy, a trusted Vietnam adviser. The memorandum concluded that in the summer of 1965 “we have no direct channel to Hanoi” and third-party attempts “do not really permit useful exchanges.” Nonetheless, “every negotiating action must be considered in relation to its effect on

³⁴ McGeorge Bundy to Lyndon Johnson, January 10, 1966, Document No. 0240316020, Box 3, Folder 16, Larry Berman Collection (Presidential Archives Research), The Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

the morale of the government and people in South Vietnam.” Moreover, the Nguyen Cao Ky government in South Vietnam publicly and privately explained to the U.S. government that any recognition of the NLF “would not only weaken morale but open the government to charges of neutralism that could well lead to its overthrow. This sensitivity would apply almost equally to any US recognition of the NLF as an independent party, or to any belief that the US was dealing in any way with the NLF.”³⁵ There was a feeling amongst South Vietnamese leaders Ky and Nguyen Van Thieu, expressed more thoroughly during the peace offensive, that the Johnson administration created its Vietnam policy and then informed Saigon afterward. If it was publicly disclosed that the United States was negotiating with Hanoi to end the conflict, this would significantly undermine the legitimacy of the Ky government and call into question the United States’ stated objective of saving South Vietnam from communist takeover.³⁶ Nonetheless, the bombing pause and peace offensive created openings in the Johnson administration to engage Hanoi at a very low-level.

³⁵ William P. Bundy, “Memorandum: Negotiating and International Actions Concerning Vietnam,” July 24, 1965, pp. 4, 10, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Box 192, LBJL.

³⁶ These points were made during high-level meetings and in memoranda with President Johnson’s top advisers. President Ky and General Thieu of South Vietnam had a chance to express the embarrassment their government felt at the fact Washington was making decisions without input from the Republic of Vietnam in a meeting in Saigon with Secretary Rusk, peace envoy Harriman and Ambassador Lodge on January 15, 1966. General Thieu told the U.S. representatives that the DRV “have rejected” the offer to negotiate and that once bombing has resumed the U.S. “will have to be more aggressive.” However, Thieu also expressed that the South Vietnamese “Army and the general public have the feeling the GVN has not been kept informed of all measures the USG has taken in the peace offensive.” Memorandum of Conversation, Saigon, January 15, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, Document 23, pp. 65-69.



At the January 10 morning White House press briefing, Bill Moyers, the president's press secretary, was initially able to dodge questions about the allegations made by Lynd, Hayden, and Aptheker. However, returning for a second afternoon briefing, Moyers told the press that the travelers were "incompletely informed" and that it was a "safe deduction" the U.S. had made contact with North Vietnam.³⁷ Moyers' response was influenced by a brief exchange on "the problems posed by Lynd" during a meeting with President Johnson's principal Vietnam advisors and demonstrated the dilemma the administration faced. According to President Johnson: "I would answer 'No good purpose to be served by going into details. Lynd is uninformed man.'" Under Secretary of State George Ball followed up: "We have avoided official confirmation of any direct contact in VN (Vietnam)."³⁸

Vice President Hubert Humphrey, just returning from India as part of a peace offensive delegation whilst attending the funeral of the recently deceased Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, took it upon himself to contact McGeorge Bundy to ask "what are the facts?" regarding the Lynd statement to the press. "I make no case for Lynd, as you know," Humphrey wrote. "I do, however, feel that his comments about our lack of direct approach to Hanoi will have some effect on the people's attitude toward the President's peace offensive." Bundy responded the next day: "As I am sure you have learned from Dean Rusk, Lynd is quite uninformed. The President has asked that we hold the full facts very closely, but at your convenience I will be glad to fill

³⁷ Press Briefing, January 10, 1966, White House Press Office, Box 9, LBJL.

³⁸ "Notes of Meeting," January 10, 1966, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, Folder January 10, 1966—1:10 p.m. Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisers on Bombing Pause, LBJL.

you in on your return.”³⁹

The facts could not be held too closely as the *New York Times* and other news outlets reported on January 11 that the U.S. government did indeed pass a note to the DRV representative in Rangoon, Burma, on December 29, 1965.⁴⁰ This was part of the secret PINTA channel opened during the “Peace Offensive” on the same day an aide-mémoire was passed by the U.S. Ambassador to Burma, Henry Byroade, to the North Vietnamese Consul General, Vu Huu Binh. The aide-mémoire conceded that while reconnaissance flights continued over the North, the substance of the short message read,

No decision has been made regarding a resumption of bombings and unless there is a major provocation we would hope that the present stand-down, which is in its fifth day, could extend beyond New Year. If your government will now reciprocate by making a serious contribution toward peace, it would obviously have a favorable effect on the possibility of further extending the suspension.⁴¹

At the same time, Paul Sturm, a U.S. unofficial envoy in France engaged in the XYZ Channel created in August 1965 with the North Vietnamese commercial representative Mai Van Bo, was instructed to inform the Vietnamese of the Rangoon contact, pass on the aide-

³⁹ Hubert Humphrey to McGeorge Bundy, January 10, 1966; and, Bundy to Humphrey, January 11, 1966, National Security—Defense (EX ND 19/CO 312 12/3/65), Folder ND 19/CO 312 (1/8/66 –1/14/66), Box 218, LBJL.

⁴⁰ John D. Pomfret, “Hanoi Accepted Secret U.S. Note, Washington Says,” *The New York Times*, January 11, 1966, 1.

⁴¹ Text of Aide-Mémoire from Henry Byroade to Vu Huu Binh, December 29, 1965, reproduced in *The Official Pentagon Papers*, Part VI.C.1, p. 118.



mémoire, and was told that a positive response to the bombing pause could be “a clear major reduction in level of VC military activity and terrorism in SVN [South Vietnam].”⁴² As later discussions in Moscow and Rangoon demonstrated, the North Vietnamese viewed this as an ultimatum and found the newly released Fourteen Points as an insult because point thirteen referred to North Vietnamese “aggression” in South Vietnam.⁴³

Bill Moyers’ admission that it was a “safe deduction” direct contact had been made had a rippling effect in Washington, Saigon, and Hanoi. In the aftermath of Moyers’ confirmation, George Ball telegrammed the U.S. Embassy in Paris that if Mai Van Bo criticizes Moyers’ affirmation, the U.S. representative “should respond that this minimal admission, which USG has been careful not to expand on, was necessitated by Pham Van Dong’s flat statement for publication to Professor Lynd in Hanoi earlier this month that there had been no such contact.”⁴⁴ Indeed, DRV representatives in Rangoon and Moscow criticized U.S. confirmation of the opening of direct talks on December 29, 1965. Given these criticisms, it is plausible to conclude that the North Vietnamese prime minister did not disclose the Rangoon channel to Lynd out of a diplomatic courtesy or protocol and that Lynd’s disclosure exposed a nerve in Washington that it was indeed not

⁴² Quoted in Footnote 2, in Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Burma, December 28, 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume III, Vietnam, June-December 1965*, Document 257, p. 722.

⁴³ There is an illuminating discussion between former North Vietnamese officials with Robert McNamara on the Fourteen Points, “Peace Offensive” and the PINTA channel in McNamara, Blight, and Brigham, *Argument Without End*, 232-239, 273-278. For more on the PINTA Channel, see *The Official Pentagon Papers*, Part VI.C.1., pp. 108-147.

⁴⁴ George Ball to Charles Bohlen, 11 January 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, Document 16, p. 46.

engaging in direct talks with the North Vietnamese on a scale consummate with the avowed public pronouncements of the “Peace Offensive.” This was freely admitted by the president’s national security adviser in the memorandum of January 10 cited above. It was also confirmed earlier before Lynd returned to the United States by Bundy in a meeting on January 3 when the president asked: “What else can we do—we have dispatched people all over the world. What can we do further? We know that our bombing response has not done the job.” When presidential special adviser Jack Valenti proposed “direct contact” with Hanoi through sympathetic third countries, Bundy stated: “We are doing a great deal of this. We need to do more.”⁴⁵

The Johnson administration’s admission that there were direct talks influenced the government in Saigon. Following the controversy, Ambassador Lodge wrote to Dean Rusk that Moyers’ statement to the press “is potentially a great danger to the war effort” because it could drive a wedge between the United States and the South Vietnamese government. The Ky government was concerned that the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam was waning and sought out clarification during the upcoming visit by Secretary of State Rusk and special peace envoy Averell Harriman. In relaying this telegram to President Johnson, Bundy wrote that this concern from South Vietnam “argues against a direct reference to our contact with Hanoi in the State of the Union” address.⁴⁶ Indeed, after the Lodge telegram and anxiety expressed by South Vietnam, President Johnson removed the already drafted portion of the speech about direct contacts with Hanoi out of concern not for

⁴⁵ “Notes of Meeting”, January 3, 1966, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, Folder January 3, 1966 Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisors on Bombing Pause, LBJL.

⁴⁶ Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. to Dean Rusk, January 12, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, Document 18, pp. 54-55. McGeorge Bundy is quoted in footnote 2.



the effect it would have on potential negotiations with Hanoi, but because of the damage it would do in South Vietnam in their ongoing efforts to defeat the NLF.⁴⁷ On January 12, the president delivered his State of the Union speech and when it came time to address the peace offensive, Johnson argued,

We will meet at any conference table, we will discuss any proposal—four points or fourteen or forty—and we will consider the views of any group. We will work for a cease-fire now or once discussions have begun. We will respond if others reduce their use of force, and we will withdraw our soldiers once South Vietnam is securely guaranteed the right to shape its own future.⁴⁸

While the decision to remove the mention of direct contacts with Hanoi from the State of the Union address was designed to prevent a rift between Washington and Saigon, another direct channel was nonetheless opened in Moscow.

On January 4, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin told Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri that if the United States wanted peace in Vietnam it should open direct talks with North Vietnam. When word of this discussion reached Washington, Dean Rusk told President Johnson in a telephone call on January 6 that “if it’s true as stated that is also of

⁴⁷ Memorandum of Telephone Conversation Between President Johnson and Under Secretary of State Ball, January 12, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, Document 19, pp. 56-57.

⁴⁸ Lyndon Johnson, State of the Union Address, January 12, 1966, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966, Book I—January 1 to June 30, 1966* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1967), 11.

some significance.”⁴⁹ Over the next week and a half, the State Department tried to verify Kosygin’s sincerity as the Soviet diplomat continued to refuse to act as a mediator or propose where such a direct contact could take place.⁵⁰ Intervening in this possible peace feeler was, of course, the latent admission among top-level officials that there was not enough direct contact with Hanoi, a fact enhanced by the Lynd direct contact controversy. Therefore, the “the problems posed by Lynd” played a part in the decision for the U.S. to reach out to the DRV in Moscow because the timing of the controversy forced members of the Johnson administration to ask themselves if enough was being done to convince the public of its efforts. There was also a desire to stave off any DRV attempt to publicly argue the United States had not engaged in direct talks.

In the ensuing days, and without direct confirmation from Kosygin about his remarks, the United States took the initiative. On January 17, George Ball wrote to the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, Foy D. Kohler, with a substantial instruction to approach the DRV representative in Moscow. The direct approach came from the concern that “Hanoi may try [to] make propaganda capital by claiming no direct substantive contact was made by the US with DRV during current diplomatic activity and pause.” The telegram goes on to provide detailed directions on what to say and how to respond to possible challenges from the DRV. These instructions are significant because they lay out in great detail the U.S. negotiating position vis-à-vis

⁴⁹ Telephone conversation # 9446, sound recording, LBJ and Dean Rusk, Recordings and Transcripts of Telephone Conversations and Meetings, LBJL.

⁵⁰ There was no strong confirmation in Prime Minister Shastri’s letter to President Johnson, January 6, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XXV, South Asia, 1966*, Document 275, pp.525-526, or in Rusk’s conversation with Kosygin on January 13, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, 1966*, Document 147, pp. 367-369.



Hanoi. For instance, there is an admission on the part of the United States that it has viewed a “high incident rate in South but low level of large-scale attacks” during the bombing pause and, therefore, sought confirmation whether this was a signal to Washington. Moreover, it outlines the kinds of deeds Hanoi could undertake in order to show its willingness to reciprocate, such as: a decrease in the movement of troops and supplies along the Ho Chi Minh trail, a decrease in military actions and terrorism in South Vietnam, and the withdrawal of regular DRV military units.

While the United States was ready to agree to a reconvening of the Geneva Conference with the same countries as in 1954, or perhaps with the addition of mutually agreed to countries, without preconditions, the United States nonetheless viewed the Four Points as preconditions and stumbling block to negotiations. Animating the U.S. position on the Geneva Accords was the view that the partition of North and South Vietnam was permanent and South Vietnam was an independent nation-state. Therefore, any North Vietnamese intervention in South Vietnam was an act of outside aggression. Ball wrote to Kohler that the DRV should accept its forces in South Vietnam were “foreign forces” and therefore “subject to withdrawal” alongside U.S. forces. Thus, any reunification of North and South Vietnam, the minimal goal of the North Vietnamese, was to occur under free, internationally supervised elections.

This demand influenced the U.S. view of Point Three in the DRV’s Four Points. According to Ball’s instruction, Washington viewed the DRV’s position as amounting to an “insistence on immediate NLF major and probably dominant role in coalition government that would replace present government in Saigon, prior to any election process.” Given the U.S. goal of stabilizing the government in the South,

Washington argued point three “would be imposed and arbitrary” and “which we cannot accept in principle as basis of negotiations and for which we see no warrant in Geneva Accords.” This position was complicated by the fact that the United States “does not regard NLF as independent entity, but as created and in last analysis controlled by DRV,” and that the NLF was just one of at least seven “interest group[s]” in South Vietnam. Therefore, while the NLF could be represented within the circle of the DRV diplomatic team during negotiations, the “whole USG concern in SVN arises from DRV role, and this can only be discussed and negotiated with DRV itself.”

Perhaps most crucially, the question of U.S. withdrawal is addressed in the telegram. This was the crux of the issue and there appeared to be an opening provided: “any insistence on prior US withdrawal is obviously unrealistic, and we have understood some private Hanoi messages to mean that DRV does not thus insist. Could DRV confirm this or clarify its government’s position.”⁵¹ This was an important admission by the United States, which continued to argue publicly that Hanoi’s position was rigid on this very point. According to Hanoi, they felt they had made this point clear already in the XYZ channel in Paris when they informed both the French and the U.S. representative, Edmund Gullion, that the Four Points were not “prior conditions but rather as working principles” to be negotiated. At a conference of top-level U.S. officials and historians with North Vietnamese officials in 1997, Luu Van Loi, former DRV assistant secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, co-writer of the Four Points, and North Vietnamese secret diplomacy chief, told the American delegation: “You see, we thought—it seemed obvious—that after the

⁵¹ Telegram (1745) from the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, January 17, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, Document 25, pp. 70-73.



discussions between Gullion and Mai Van Bo, that the Four Points had been clarified to you. We thought this. If not then, then later, via PINTA/Rangoon.”⁵²

The January 24 direct meeting between Kohler and North Vietnamese charge d'affaires, Le Chang, did not bode well for the possibility of opening up talks and demonstrated the inconsistencies, as seen from Hanoi, in the “Peace Offensive” of the United States. Nonetheless, it should be noted that unlike the May 1965 bombing pause, codenamed MAYFLOWER, the DRV agreed to speak with the United States this time. This was surely a signal of Hanoi’s willingness to talk.⁵³ As Kohler summarized the encounter, Le Chang stated that the United States continued to refuse acceptance of the DRV’s Four Points, which it viewed as grounded in the Geneva Accords. While the United States suspended the bombing of North Vietnam, it had no right to bomb the DRV in the first place which was a direct assault on Vietnamese sovereignty. Therefore, the ongoing reconnaissance flights over the DRV continued to violate its airspace. Moreover, the DRV viewed the bombing pause as a preparation for new escalation and this was tantamount to coercing Hanoi to negotiate on U.S. terms and from a position of strength. Crucially, U.S. military activity continued unabated in the South. In outlining these actions, the charge d'affaires echoed the DRV Foreign Ministry statement of January 4 calling on the United States to prove its will for peace through “actual deeds,” and to unconditionally stop the bombing of North Vietnam. While not closing the channel outright, the DRV representative suggested that, if there

⁵² McNamara, Blight, and Brigham, *Argument Without End*, 269–270, 277.

⁵³ For more on the refusal of the DRV’s Embassy in Moscow to see U.S. representatives during MAYFLOWER, see: *The Official Pentagon Papers*, Part VI.C.1., pp. 53–58; and Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 97.

was no new information to be conveyed, the U.S. could continue to pass along information through the Rangoon channel because meetings in Moscow were difficult to organize. Finally, in order to demonstrate Hanoi's offense to the U.S. Fourteen Points, Kohler wrote: "He then returned three papers I had given him, saying that in addition to already being available to his govt they also referred to aggression by DRV."⁵⁴

This lengthy discussion of the Moscow channel helps us understand the U.S. position it was willing to convey to Hanoi, and also demonstrates how each side viewed its actions during the peace offensive. The failure of the Moscow channel and the direct contact controversy demonstrates four major aspects of the U.S. peace offensive and helps clarify the insincerity of the U.S. position. Here is where Lynd's efforts in traveling to Hanoi on the factfinding mission and his initiatives during January by speaking and writing against the resumption of bombing, and for an end to the war, contribute to our understanding of this major period in the escalation of the war and how it was perhaps the last major opportunity to avoid further escalation.

The Lack of Direct Contact: The Question of Troop Withdrawals and Recognition of the NLF

After the president's press secretary confirmed that a note was passed in Rangoon by the United States to a representative of the DRV, Staughton Lynd questioned the sincerity of the U.S. *démarche*. Speaking to an overflow crowd of 3,000 at Yale's Woolsey Hall on January 17, Lynd recounted his two-hour conversation at his New Haven

⁵⁴ Telegram (2306) from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, January 24, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam 1966*, Document 37, pp. 117-121.



apartment with the James Leonard, the State Department's Deputy Director of Research for the Far East. Six days earlier, according to Lynd, Leonard explained the government's confusion over Point Three of the DRV's Four Points and argued that to accept the Points would equal "unconditional surrender" of the United States. Moreover, without reciprocal actions on the part of Hanoi, the United States was unwilling to perform the "actual deeds" of de-escalation demanded by Hanoi. From Lynd's vantage point, as he spoke during the cold New Haven night, the solution was clear: "direct contact with the DRV and with the NLF might help to resolve these essentially procedural problems."⁵⁵

Lynd proposed that possible solutions to these issues already existed. In his conversations with Premier Pham Van Dong and Colonel Ha Van Lau, the DRV representative to the International Control Commission (ICC), Lynd reported that "the physical withdrawal of American troops prior to negotiation is not required."⁵⁶ This was a major clarification and, as we have seen from the briefing telegram George Ball sent to Ambassador Kohler in Moscow, the U.S. *did* understand from previous "private Hanoi messages" that the DRV might not insist on total withdrawal before negotiations. It is worth pausing here to reflect on the significance of this response. While the XZY channel in Paris was abruptly closed by the DRV, the first phase was begun by the DRV approaching the French Foreign Ministry with this very concession on May 18, 1965. Moreover, after conversations in

⁵⁵ Address of Professor Staughton Lynd at Woolsey Hall, Yale University, January 17, 1966, Series 2, Box 6, Folder 21, SLC, SKU-SAC. See also: James Leonard, Memorandum of Conversation, January 13, 1966, Box 13, Folder Jan., 1966 [3 of 8], Papers of William C. Gibbons, LBJL.

⁵⁶ Address of Professor Staughton Lynd at Woolsey Hall, Yale University, January 17, 1966, Series 2, Box 6, Folder 21, SLC, KSU-SCA.

Hanoi, this same message was reported by the British Labour MP, Lord Fenner Brockway, in late-August 1965 and by the Italian professor, La Pira, to Italian Foreign Minister Fanfani in November 1965. While the DRV took the unprecedented step of publicly disavowing such statements, they did not do so in the case of Lynd in January 1966. While hard-nose diplomatic historians may question the seriousness of these communications by avowed peace activists and the certain ambiguity with which the DRV closed the XYZ channel, the consistency of the DRV private position cannot be ignored. Secretary Rusk's response to Italian Foreign Minister Fanfani, not meant for public disclosure, noted that this private position conflicted with "public statements by Hanoi."⁵⁷ Interestingly for our purposes, Victor Campbell Moore, the Canadian representative on the International Control Commission, relayed to Henry Cabot Lodge his conversation with the DRV's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs in the summer of 1966 "that the La Pira peace feeler had been genuine, but the Hanoi regime had had to denounce it when the leak came [from the U.S. State Department]."⁵⁸

For Lynd, taking his cue from a lesson from the very recent past, this episode suggested an alternative route for Washington in its dealings with the DRV. As the State Department's James Leonard paraphrased it: "Lynd suggested that if the U.S. would do as it had in the Cuba missile crisis and pick up some positive points from the declarations of the other side, then the North Vietnamese would not insist on the points which had been omitted" in its harder public

⁵⁷ "Text of Letters from Fanfani and Rusk," *New York Times*, December 18, 1965, 3.

⁵⁸ Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. to Dean Rusk, June 8, 1966, in *The Official Pentagon Papers*, Part VI.C.1., p. 178.



pronouncements.⁵⁹ The preponderance of private communications in 1965 demonstrated that this was a topic which was open to discussion.

On the most important question at this point in the long history of Vietnam War diplomacy—the meaning of Point Three of the DRV’s Four Points—Lynd told those assembled at Woolsey Hall: “Colonel Lau told us that one possible actual deed would be recognition of the NLF, a step involving no military de-escalation at all.” A few moments later, Lynd relayed that Premier Pham indicated that a way of accepting Point Three was “simply recognition of the NLF.” Therefore, Lynd came away from North Vietnam with the belief that if the Johnson administration were to recognize the South Vietnamese revolutionaries, “we might find that other aspects of the NLF program would become more negotiable.” Lynd’s central lesson, presented to anyone who would listen in January 1966, could be boiled down to this: “to make peace, you must knock on the doors of those whom you are fighting; to make peace, you must be willing to reason together with your antagonist; to make peace, we must initiate and deepen direct contacts with both the DRV government and the NLF.”⁶⁰ Anything less was simply a recipe for failure.

Insufficient Signals to Hanoi

In one of the first books written by a member of the Johnson administration with firsthand knowledge of these events, the National Security Council staff, Chester Cooper, wrote in 1970 that on Christmas day 1965 a ceasefire was called throughout the whole of Vietnam. The following day the war continued in the South while the bombing over

⁵⁹ James Leonard, Memorandum of Conversation, January 13, 1966, Box 13, Folder Jan., 1966 [3 of 8], Papers of William C. Gibbons, LBJL.

⁶⁰ Address of Professor Staughton Lynd at Woolsey Hall, Yale University, January 17, 1966, Series 2, Box 6, Folder 21, SLC, KSU-SCA.

North Vietnam “was extended for one more day.” With the fate of the extended bombing pause not yet known until December 27, Cooper cautioned that “future historians would do well to ponder over the importance of this extra day.”⁶¹ Clearly, for Cooper, the extension of the bombing pause over North Vietnam was a major concession on the part of the Johnson administration. But here, in this championing of the pause and the leadership of the president and his advisers, is the unacknowledged reality that the peace offensive was doomed to fail before it even began.

Even if the bombing pause over North Vietnam was a substantial concession by the United States, given the Cold War logic of its military intervention, the continued military operations in South Vietnam should have been understood as a provocation to Hanoi. The Johnson administration believed, as confirmed in George Ball’s telegram to Kohler, that the NLF was not an “independent entity,” and was “created” and “controlled” by the DRV. Therefore, any attack against the NLF in South Vietnam was an attack on North Vietnam and vice-versa. If this was the case, it was surely a confusing signal to Hanoi. This much was felt by Clark Clifford, personal advisor to the president and future secretary of defense, who opposed the bombing halt to begin with. Writing in his memoirs, Clifford pointed out that when the extended bombing pause began it was coupled with “massive ground force operations supported by heavy air attacks *inside* South Vietnam.” While this made sense militarily, “the American offensive also had the effect of negating whatever message McNamara and the President intended with the bombing pause.” Starkly, Clifford concluded that “it

⁶¹ Chester Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1970), 291.



was an incomprehensible combination of mixed signals, I thought, that we were sending to Hanoi.”⁶²

The DRV repeatedly protested the continued military operations in the South to Lynd, Hayden, and Aptheker, in its official Foreign Ministry statement on January 4, as well as in Ho Chi Minh’s letter of January 24, and to Ambassador Kohler on January 21 and January 24 in Moscow. More than the continuation of military operations, during the bombing pause the United States increased its troops in South Vietnam from 184,000 to 197,000. From this perspective, it was not just mixed signals but an overt showing of the United States’ hand that it was preparing for escalation. Any failure on the part of Hanoi to respond to the peace offensive, despite the fact there was evidence they were responding, must be understood in the context of ongoing U.S. military operations in the South. A question can be asked whether these military operations played a part in the stiffening of Hanoi’s position at its Twelfth Plenum in late-December 1965 and the choice for a protracted war strategy while the peace offensive was just beginning.

There was some recognition on the part of President Johnson of the inconsistency in stopping the bombing of North Vietnam and continuing the war in the South unabated. On January 22 he told his aides he felt like the United States had “given away a trading point without getting anything in return. Next, the cry will be not to bomb in the South.” As seen by the advocates for a resumption of the bombing, who by this point on January 22 included all the president’s principal advisors except for George Ball, the bombing pause and peace offensive opened the door for critics to call for more actions on the part of the United States, and the longer the pause continued the more difficult it

⁶² Clark Clifford, with Richard Holbrooke, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1991), 436.

would be to resume offensive operations. The idea of stopping military operations in South Vietnam, and the secret bombing of Laos, was never entertained except as an example in meetings for why the administration needed to quickly resume bombing North Vietnam before it was too difficult to convince the public and the Congress otherwise.

Did Hanoi Respond?

As Lynd pointed out, beginning on January 24 at the Washington Hilton and again in various articles after the resumption of bombing, press reports indicated that the PAVN had not engaged in any major military offensive since at least November 1965. For Lynd, this was a possible signal from Hanoi that it was responding to Washington's bombing pause and peace offensive.⁶³

While there was some speculation that such decreases in military activity were part of the "normal fluctuations" associated with the Tet holiday or part of a period of slow down after large offensives, there is widespread evidence that across the administration there was an understanding and knowledge that the PAVN and PLAF had slowed down attacks against the U.S. and Vietnamese during the "Peace Offensive." When Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. wrote to warn the Johnson administration from talking about direct contacts with North Vietnam, he included a section in his memorandum on the decrease in attacks. "The level of Viet Cong activity declined during the week while

⁶³ Staughton Lynd, "What Should The United States Do in Vietnam?" January 24, 1966, Series 2, Box 6, Folder 20, SLC, KSU-SCA; Staughton Lynd and Tom Hayden, "The Peace That Might Have Been," February 1966, Series 2, Box 6, Folder 21, SLC, KSU-SCA; "Transcript of a speech given by Professor Staughton Lynd, Yale University, at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, March 2, 1966," Lynd FBI File; Staughton Lynd, "The Resumption of Bombing," *Liberation*, March 1966, 3-4; and, Staughton Lynd, "Did Hanoi Respond?" *Viet-Report*, March-April 1966, 18-22.



combined Vietnamese-Free World task forces mounted major assaults in Phu Yen Province of Central Vietnam and in the Plain of Reeds Southwest of Saigon,” he reported. Moreover, “statistically the Viet Cong incidents dropped from 1,133 for the preceding week to 973. Of this total, 17 were attacks or ambushes while 645 were acts of terrorism. The remainder were acts of sabotage, propaganda or anti-aircraft fire.”⁶⁴ While the ambassador did not comment on the significance of the decrease, it was becoming clearer that this would become an impediment to the resumption of bombing.

In his Moscow meeting with the DRV charge d’affaires, Ambassador Kohler remarked that the United States had seen increased infiltration of men and materials from North Vietnam through Laos into South Vietnam, and George Ball sought clarification about the decrease in attacks and whether this was a signal to the United States. Undoubtedly, the North Vietnamese missed an opportunity to clarify this point and is an important question for future research in the Vietnamese archives. It is plausible this was not a signal from the Vietnamese revolutionaries to Washington. What matters though is that this point became a matter of controversy within the administration and the extent to which they were comfortable resuming the bombing without an answer to this crucial question.

On the fringes of the Tuesday lunch club of decisionmakers—Johnson, Rusk, Bundy, McNamara and sometimes the CIA director—there were persuasive arguments being made for continuing the bombing pause. The State Department’s legal advisor, Leonard Meeker, who during this same period was publicly making legal arguments for the U.S. intervention in Vietnam, wrote to Secretary Rusk and

⁶⁴ Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. to Dean Rusk, January 12, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, Document 18.

Undersecretary Ball on January 20 that the North Vietnamese simply needed more time to respond. One of the reasons was that, according to the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), PLAF military activity "appears to have been a little lower than in the three or four weeks before Christmas," and that "there have been no confirmed PAVN attacks since November 1965." Therefore, for Meeker, the facts, as he saw them, indicated there were no "military reasons why we need to end the pause just now in order to prevent the Communist side from obtaining some marked advantage."⁶⁵

A week before the resumption of bombing, McGeorge Bundy wrote a secret memorandum to the president wherein he outlined the pros and cons of resuming the bombing. Among the reasons to resume bombing was the "real trouble with the GVN if we wait much longer." However, one salient fact could help with dealing with Saigon's objections: "There has not been any important military action by Hanoi in the South, and until there is, we can easily say to our friends in Saigon that the suspension of bombing has in fact lowered the rate of aggression."⁶⁶ This is a rather stunning admission as it indeed would have solved the major problem Washington envisioned *had* it decided to continue the bombing pause.

The issue would come into sharper relief over three days of crucial meetings between January 26 and 28. On January 26, Rusk told the president that "we are a little thin about VC activity on the ground. This may cause some trouble when we start." In order to clarify and prevent embarrassment, the administration should wait another three

⁶⁵ Leonard Meeker to Dean Rusk and George Ball, January 20, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, Document 31, pp. 95-97.

⁶⁶ McGeorge Bundy to Lyndon Johnson, January 24, 1966, National Security File, Memos to the President, McGeorge Bundy and Robert Komer, Box 6 (1 of 2), Folder 3 of 3, LBJL.



days until it decided to resume bombing.⁶⁷ The following day, an important exchange occurred after the president asked Rusk about the “significance” of the low-level of attacks in South Vietnam. Rusk responded that if it continued “perhaps it would be significant,” but that there were reports the PLAF were preparing for more “guerrilla type warfare.” The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Earle Wheeler, interjected that the U.S. military force commander in Vietnam, Gen. William Westmoreland, was growing concerned that there might be PAVN and PLAF offensive in northern part of South Vietnam. The next portion is key:

Wheeler: Fact there haven't been number of sizable attacks is meaningless.

Bundy: It is unusual for (so) few attacks so long.

(Wheeler:) Not so, really.

McNamara: Rate of activity is off since Tet. Don't know why, nor will we for at least a week, but they are continuing to reinforce at rapid rate.

President: Don't know “why” —but the “why” is probably not to our advantage.

McNamara: I agree. Further delay on resumption of bombing can polarize opinion in this country. I feel we should resume—and send execute order tonight.

A few minutes later, McGeorge Bundy argued that the “only reason for prolonging is the low level of VC activity—and opinion of [Pakistani President Muhammad] Ayub and others that it would create

⁶⁷ Notes of Meeting, January 26, 1966, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, Folder January 26, 1966—Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisors on Resumption of Bombing, LBJL.

confusion on the other side.” The president concluded the meeting indicating he wanted to resume the bombing, but that he felt “less comfortable tonight than I felt last night” because of this controversy and opposition the resumption of bombing would bring from “the Senate, peace lovers, ministers, etc.” Given the question about the lower level of military engagement from the other side, the president argued, “I don’t think we have the case made to resume bombing. What will the papers say?”⁶⁸

Indeed, the three groups the president mentioned—Senators, peace lovers, and religious leaders—were on the move to encourage the continuation of the bombing pause. On January 19, the National Emergency Committee of Concerned Clergy About Vietnam issued a statement that it was going to seize on the openings created and “a growing consensus across the country against the war and in support of his [President Johnson’s] peace offensive.”⁶⁹ Unease was growing on Capitol Hill during the final week of the bombing pause because Rusk and other members of the administration were signaling to the media that the resumption of bombing would be just a matter of time. On January 24, Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), and Senator Mike Mansfield, Democratic Majority Leader, publicly called for the bombing pause to continue. Fulbright even called for the NLF to be included in peace

⁶⁸ Notes of Meeting, January 27, 1966, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, Folder January 27, 1966—8:20 p.m. Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisors on Resumption of Bombing, LBJL.

⁶⁹ “Clerics Unite, Fight Escalation,” *Washington Post*, January 20, 1966, A18. Not knowing that President Johnson had already ordered the bombing over North Vietnam to resume, the National Emergency Committee organized an emergency meeting in New York City on January 30. See: “Call to All Clergymen,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1966, 44; “Clergy Assailed on Vietnam Peril,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1966, 6; and, Homer Bigart, “Clerics Here Ask Gradual Pullout,” *New York Times*, January 31, 1966, 11.



negotiations and Senatorial members of the SFRC called on Secretary of State Rusk to make assurances that the administration would consult that body before resuming bombing over North Vietnam.⁷⁰ Three days later, after days of jockeying behind the scenes on Capitol Hill, fifteen Republican and Democratic Senators wrote to President Johnson urging him continue the bombing pause. The Senators joined seventy-six House members who had sent a letter to the president just a week earlier seeking an extension of the bombing pause.⁷¹

Bombing with open channels?

The other substantial issue left unresolved were those direct channels still left open between the United States and the DRV. While direct contacts were made between the United States and the DRV in Paris, Rangoon and Moscow, and Washington-sanctioned third-party talks with DRV representatives were undertaken by the Polish and the Laotians, the contacts which remained open were not given sufficient time to work. When the tide began to turn after week three of the “Peace Offensive” and discussion turned toward when to resume bombing, these direct channels became a liability to the Johnson administration. In a telephone conversation between President Johnson and Secretary McNamara on January 17, the secretary relayed he was in agreement with Bundy and Ball that they should go back to Rangoon, Moscow, and Warsaw and “follow each one of these hot leads or warm leads so that by the end of the week we can tell you that we’ve checked

⁷⁰ Tom Wicker, “Key Senators Ask That U.S. Continue Pause in Bombing,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1966, 1.

⁷¹ E.W. Kenworthy, “6 Democrats Try to Rally Senate Against Bombing,” *New York Times*, January 27, 1966, 1; E.W. Kenworthy, “15 in Senate Urge President Extend Pause in Bombing,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1966, 1; and, Murrey Marder, “15 in Senate Ask a Voice on Bombing,” *Washington Post*, January 28, 1966, A1.

them off and there's nothing more to expect from them." Later in the call, McNamara told the president that there was no intelligence the U.S. government had which suggested Hanoi was "moving toward negotiation in order to lead us to extend the pause." If they did, the United States would be forced to do so, "but I haven't seen any evidence that they'll move in that direction."⁷²

The consensus arose that the "Peace Offensive" was played out when a foil to potentially upend the resumption of bombing emerged. On January 19, George Ball reported to President Johnson that two days earlier the North Vietnamese charge d'affaires in Vientiane approached Laotian President Souvanna Phouma "to deliver a demarche under instructions from Hanoi." While there was some debate over the significance of this maneuver by Hanoi, the State Department relayed to Souvanna through the U.S. Ambassador to Laos, William Sullivan, that the Laotian president could be the go-between to set up a meeting between Sullivan and the DRV in Vientiane. The message the DRV authorized to be discussed with Souvanna was the meaning of Washington's Fourteen Points. Ball informed the president that this was perhaps "no basis for a solid dialogue," but that "it may be a prelude either to the opening of conversations through Souvanna or a direct exchange between Sullivan and the North Vietnamese Charge." McGeorge Bundy, in passing on Ball's memorandum, indicated to the president that Ball "somewhat overstates its significance."⁷³

In an important meeting on January 20, where the president and his advisors agreed it was time to start wrapping up the "Peace

⁷² Telephone Conversation Between President Johnson and Secretary of Defense McNamara, January 17, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, Document 26, pp. 74-75.

⁷³ George Ball to Lyndon Johnson, January 19, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, Document 29, pp. 89-91. McGeorge Bundy quoted at FN 1.



Offensive” and preparing statements to U.S. allies and the press, McGeorge Bundy stated that “U Thant and Vientiane had intruded” and in response to the new initiative in Laos, “a ‘no answer’ should go on the record” from Hanoi. The energy was moving toward “clear[ing] the decks” and to “drive the nail in” that Hanoi has “had sufficient time and have not responded. None of the nations we have talked to have anything to report,” the North Vietnamese contacted Souvanna to discuss Rusk’s Fourteen Points. Rusk warned the president, recalling past episodes the previous year with the UN secretary-general which put the administration on the defensive, “U Thant will probably say that Souvanna Phouma talked to him—and will say we threw it out.” Both Ball and McGeorge Bundy agreed there would be a murky answer coming from Hanoi over the Laos channel. The clear message from this meeting coming from the president, as he concluded the conversation, was he wanted the newspapers to read: “the peace jig is up.”⁷⁴

The movement toward closing channels, as new ones were unexpectedly opening up, was already underway on Foggy Bottom. Rusk wrote to Ambassador Byroade in Rangoon on January 20 that “as part of our effort to close all circuits, you should seek appointment with DRV Consul General, saying simply that you are doing so under instruction.”⁷⁵ The DRV representative spoke with the U.S. Ambassador on January 21, giving his opinion that the December 29, 1965 aide-memoire was an ultimatum but that he did not have any official report from his government. A response would come in the form of an aide-memoire from the DRV on January 24 which outlined new U.S. troops

⁷⁴ Notes of Meeting, January 20, 1966, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, Folder January 20, 1966—5:50 p.m. Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisors on Vietnam, LBJL.

⁷⁵ Dean Rusk to Byroade, January 20, 1966, *The Official Pentagon Papers*, Part VI.C.1., p.124.

were arriving in South Vietnam since the opening of the “Peace Offensive” and that Washington’s Fourteen Points “contain nothing new.” McGeorge Bundy, reporting on the dispatch from Rangoon, told President Johnson that the ambassador “received a very tough memo from the Hanoi Charge which pretty well closes that circuit.” The reality was the Rangoon/PINTA channel was not closed as Byroade received instructions from the State Department to continue the contact.⁷⁶

Not everyone agreed with Rusk and Bundy. While the State Department’s legal advisor was warning Rusk and George Ball about the decreased military activity of the other side in South Vietnam, he also pointed out the inconsistencies of trying to close direct channels with Hanoi before they had adequate time to respond. “While four weeks may seem to us a lengthy period in which to await an answer to our overtures,” Meeker cautioned that debate in Hanoi and with its allies “may not yet have run its course.” He reminded Rusk, as Ball did not need much convincing, that it took nine months for the Johnson administration to formulate and release its own Fourteen Points, and that “it may be unrealistic to expect the Communist side to coordinate fully with our timing and to respond promptly after the fourteen points have been communicated.” Therefore, if the U.S. resumed bombing North Vietnam this would surely close the direct channels it had opened or those sanctioned with third parties and “wipe out the practical possibilities of further efforts at peaceful settlement for quite

⁷⁶ *The Official Pentagon Papers*, Part VI.C.1., pp.125-128. William P. Bundy, “Diplomatic and Political Factors Affecting the Resumption of Bombing,” January 28, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, Document 51, pp. 170-173. McGeorge Bundy quoted at FN4.



some time to come. ”⁷⁷ The totality of Meeker’s memorandum, referred to at length, offered a stark and sober warning.

The problem of open channels was discussed during the January 22 meeting. The principal advisors to the president were urging that the channels which were open be closed before they resumed bombing. Rusk told LBJ there was still an open channel in Vientiane, and later in the discussion William P. Bundy and McGeorge Bundy filled in the blanks about the channels in Laos, Moscow, and Rangoon. William Bundy argued that while the bombing should be resumed, “we need a few days to tidy up” these contacts. Concluding the meeting, the president asked if they could not go “back to Kohler and Souvanna and see if we can’t close that circuit?” McGeorge Bundy stated he would try that day.⁷⁸ Two days later, McGeorge Bundy warned the president, as Ball had done five days earlier, that “people of genuine good will who think that another week or two might show real progress” cite the situation in Laos. Bundy cautioned that perhaps “Hanoi really wants us to resume the bombing and is trying to push us into that position while pretending to keep the Vientiane line open.”⁷⁹ On the same day, Bundy informed the president’s top advisors that the ongoing diplomatic channel in Laos was disrupting the administration’s ability to convey the message that Hanoi was not responding to the “Peace Offensive.

⁷⁷ Leonard Meeker to Dean Rusk and George Ball, January 20, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, Document 31, pp. 95-97.

⁷⁸ Notes of Meeting, January 22, 1966, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, Folder January 22, 1966—12:00 noon Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisors on Resumption of Bombing, LBJL.

⁷⁹ McGeorge Bundy to Lyndon Johnson, January 24, 1966, National Security File, Memos to the President, McGeorge Bundy and Robert Komer, Box 6 (1 of 2), Folder 3 of 3, LBJL.

Bundy said, “My brother went over it with the British and Australians. Both said, ‘You’ll have to hold off until you hear more.’”⁸⁰

Two days later, on January 26 the president and his advisors discussed the remaining issues with the Vientiane channel and the potential problems this could cause in delaying the resumption of the bombing. McGeorge Bundy put the odds that Souvanna would fail to come up with a significant concession from the DRV at nine to one. “We ought to lean on Souvanna hard and tell him we’re his friends and we’ll wait till Saturday.” The president responded, “I’m afraid they’ll give us some peace treatment that will be phony—and put us in a box.”⁸¹ The following day Rusk reported that Souvanna’s plane to North Vietnam was delayed and would not be leaving on January 28 as planned. The chances were at least a week or longer until the United States heard news from the Vientiane channel. This was precisely the box that Lyndon Johnson did not want to find himself in. As noted above, the president concluded that the United States was not yet ready to make the case for the resumption of bombing.⁸²

On Friday January 28, William P. Bundy allayed any remaining concerns about the ongoing direct channels in a top-secret memorandum entitled “Diplomatic and Political Factors Affecting the

⁸⁰ Notes of Meeting, January 24, 1966, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, Folder January 24, 1966—6:30 p.m. Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisors on Resumption of Bombing, LBJL. Chester Cooper writes in his memoir that he urged McGeorge Bundy to continue the bombing pause for at least another two weeks and even until British Prime Minister Harold Wilson’s trip to Moscow on February 21, 1966. Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, 294–295.

⁸¹ Notes of Meeting, January 26, 1966, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, Folder January 26, 1966—Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisors on Resumption of Bombing, LBJL.

⁸² Notes of Meeting, January 27, 1966, Meeting Notes File, Box 1, Folder January 27, 1966—8:20 p.m. Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisors on Resumption of Bombing, LBJL.



Resumption of Bombing.” In the memo, Bundy concluded there was “no pending third country initiative which hinges on delay in resumption” and that the State Department had already sent out a message to most embassies around the world which “has been widely construed as our notice of imminent intent to resume.” The heart of the memorandum focused on the direct channels in Rangoon, Moscow, and Vientiane and settled that there was no response in Rangoon. In Moscow, the “over-all reaction of the DRV Charge was completely negative” with a repetition of “standard statements of Hanoi’s position” and attacks on “the sincerity of our suspension.” With the suggestion that further talks could be taken up in Rangoon, and the lack of a response there to date, both Moscow and Rangoon were nailed “down tight” as closed channels. Curiously, as Bundy himself explains, the last message sent in Rangoon was sent on January 26 and the DRV had not yet responded at the time he sent out this memorandum. Therefore, it was impossible to argue the Rangoon channel was closed. This left the Vientiane channel, which at the time of Bundy’s writing of the memorandum was also not closed. In fact, the response the United States and Souvanna were waiting for did not come until February 8, a full eleven days later and nine days after the bombing was resumed. According to Bundy, enough time had elapsed for a response, and because there was not one “gives us a tremendously strong public case, if it should ever be required, that the total picture was negative” coming from Hanoi. This was simply not the case and was used instead as pretext to support the resumption of bombing.⁸³

⁸³ William P. Bundy, “Diplomatic and Political Factors Affecting the Resumption of Bombing,” January 28, 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Volume IV, Vietnam, 1966*, Document 51, pp. 170-173.

Conclusion

The fateful decision to resume bombing, in train for over a week, was made on Friday January 28 and the orders were given the following day to begin bombing on Monday January 31. This brief accounting demonstrates the decision to resume bombing was made while two direct channels were open in Rangoon and Vientiane as well as much uncertainty about whether the decrease in military attacks by the PLAF and PAVN over the course of the peace offensive was a signal to Washington. For the president and his advisers, they could no longer wait for these two issues to be resolved, in part because they worked in Hanoi's favor and because any further delay would make it more difficult to resume the bombing. Estimates in the press were that thirty-three Senators wanted the bombing to resume, while only seventeen were willing to go on the record publicly asking the president to continue the pause.⁸⁴ Hawks in the Democratic Party—John Stennis, Richard B. Russell, and Henry M. Jackson—publicly called for the resumption of bombing. While the president maintained in private that Lynd was “uninformed” and his press secretary conveyed to the press that he was “incompletely informed,” the events outlined here show that Lynd was not too far off the mark. The decision-making presented here does not show the actions of sincere men attempting to broker a peace deal because all the ingredients existed as the open channels could have been pursued and expanded to their fullest. In fact, the evidence points to the unmistakable fact that every attempt was made to close the channels instead of open them further because they were a liability. Ultimately when President Johnson and his key

⁸⁴ E.W. Kenworthy, “6 Democrats Try to Rally Senate Against Bombing,” *New York Times*, January 27, 1966, 1.



advisors weighed the above information, they *chose* to resume the bombing and escalated the conflict to new proportions.

When it came time to inform the public, President Johnson and Secretary Rusk were purposefully misleading. “For thirty-seven days no bombs fell on North Vietnam,” the president announced on January 31. “During that time, we have made a most intensive and determined effort [...] to persuade the government in Hanoi that peace is better than war, that talking is better than fighting, and that the road to peace is open.” However, Hanoi

persist in aggression. They insist on the surrender of South Vietnam to communism. It is, therefore, very plain that there is no readiness or willingness to talk, no readiness for peace in that regime today. And what is plain in words is also plain in acts. Throughout these thirty-seven days, even at moments of truce, there has been continued violence against the people of South Vietnam, against their Government, against their soldiers, and against our American forces.⁸⁵

Secretary Rusk was even less attached to the truth when he spoke on the same day as the president, claiming that “channels which had been opened by us, one after the other, yielded no move toward peace.” Conflating the actions of the PAVN and PLAF, Rusk argued that “acts of violence in South Viet-Nam itself continued with relatively minor fluctuations at virtually the same record high levels set in the last quarter of 1965.” Asked about the noticeable reduction in PAVN attacks in the South, Rusk stated that “in the first week of the pause,

⁸⁵ Statement by the President Announcing the Resumption of Air Strikes on North Vietnam, January 31, 1966, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966, Book I—January 1 to June 30, 1966*, pp. 114–116.

that is, in the period between Christmas and New Year's, the total incidents by the V.C. [Viet Cong] and the North Vietnamese elements in the South reached an all time high, and, since that time, the weekly averages have been above the weekly averages for the final quarter of 1965."⁸⁶

While Lynd cited press reports about decreased North Vietnamese military activity and mused whether this was a signal from Hanoi, this could have been ignored by the Johnson administration. However, the reality could not be ignored within the national security state. Dean Rusk's and Lyndon Johnson's public pronouncements that Vietnamese military attacks increased during the pause were contradicted by the secretary's own legal adviser and in subsequent top-level discussions in the White House. Moreover, a CIA intelligence memorandum from February 21, 1966, three full weeks since the resumption of bombings, confirmed the lower rate of large-scale military engagements by both the PAVN and PLAF. According to statistics from Gen. Westmoreland, the CIA analyst concluded, "There has been a decline in the aggressiveness of Communist military forces in South Vietnam since the end of 1965." Parsing the numbers and distinguishing between the PAVN and PLAF, the intelligence memorandum, using the numbers from MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) in South Vietnam, showed in this time period "the rate of large-scale Viet Cong initiated attacks has been declining even though there has been some increase (22 percent from December to January) in the total number of armed attacks." Furthermore, "since November battles between US and PAVN troops in western Pleiku Province, there has been a general tendency for Communist units to

⁸⁶ Secretary Rusk's News Conference, January 31, 1966, *The Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. LIV, No. 1390, February 14, 1966, 223-229.



avoid large-scale engagements with allied forces.” While erring on the side of caution in not reading too deeply into these decreases, suspecting that it they had more to do with the Tet holiday, the conclusion is that there was a decline in large-scale military engagements in South Vietnam by both the PAVN and PLAF. Small scale attacks continued in the South alongside large-scale U.S. and allied military ground operations and heavy bombing.⁸⁷

When President Johnson resumed bombing over North Vietnam on January 31, 1966, it was a fateful *choice* that locked in an escalation which more than doubled the previous year’s military effort. Although the first bombing run over North Vietnam was more restrained than the Joint Chiefs of Staff advocated, 132 attack sorties nonetheless struck the DRV. As Lynd would later write, “the metallic doves” obliterated any efforts at peace which could have been pursued further if direct talks continued and the NLF was recognized.⁸⁸ While pursuing peace proved difficult during the bombing pause, it was not helped by the United States’ continued military actions in South Vietnam and Laos. For example, the United States flew 8,000 attack sorties over Laos to interdict soldiers and supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in January 1966 alone. This was double the amount flown over Laos in the last quarter of 1965. In 1966, the rate of escalation was astounding as bombing sorties more than tripled in North Vietnam from 25,000 in 1965 to 79,000 in 1966. In South Vietnam, U.S. attack sorties increased from 37,645 in 1965 to 124,686 in 1966. Total U.S. troops in South Vietnam were over 400,000. In total, during the Americanization of the

⁸⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence Memorandum, “Buildup of Vietnamese Communist Forces Continues After Resumption of Air Attacks,” February 21, 1966, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Collection, Document No. 0000621150.

⁸⁸ Staughton Lynd, “The Resumption of Bombing,” *Liberation*, March 1966, 3-4.

Vietnam War by the Johnson administration from 1965 to 1968, the U.S. flew 565,686 sorties in South Vietnam and 304,345 in the North; this equaled 2.2 million tons and 643,000 tons of bombs, respectively.⁸⁹

Staughton Lynd's trip with Tom Hayden and Herbert Aptheker stirred controversy in the United States over whether the Johnson administration, despite its rhetoric, made direct contact with the DRV and NLF. Lynd's efforts throughout January presented the arguments of the radical wing of the antiwar movement to a much larger audience than before and, in turn, helped to create space for dovish members of Congress to pressure the Johnson administration to continue the bombing pause and to recognize the NLF. Lynd's efforts, while denounced as treasonous and anti-American, exposed the fault-lines of the peace offensive and presented an alternative pathway toward finding peace in Vietnam by taking into consideration "the other side's" negotiating position. The consideration of the Vietnamese revolutionaries' position, at this point in early 1966, was something even critics of the Johnson administration were not willing to undertake.

After the resumption of bombing, Lynd continued his frenetic pace trying to build a mass movement against the war. Speaking at the Second International Days of Protest on March 26, 1966, Lynd told crowds in Chicago and Madison, Wisconsin, that progressive forces in

⁸⁹ A sortie is one airplane and the numbers listed here are only those planes which dropped bombs. The numbers for South Vietnam in 1965 come only from the U.S. Air Force, while the rest of the figures for both South and North Vietnam include statistics from the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps. See: John Prados, *Vietnam*, 154-155; John Schlight, *The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive, 1965-1968* (Washington: Air Force History and Museum Program, 1999); Richard P. Hallion, *Rolling Thunder 1965-1968: Johnson's Air War over Vietnam* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2018); John T. Correll, "The Vietnam War Almanac," *Air Force Magazine*, September 2004, 51; and Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 129.



this country mistakenly saw “the war as a distraction and side issue” in 1965. However, after the post-peace offensive military escalation, “this is no longer the case.” Pointing to the lack of a coherent strategy by the movement, Lynd warned that “this will be a long war” which will impact all American society, especially those working-class and poor communities most affected by the Selective Service System. With this stark reality, and with the little hope which existed for peace shattered on January 31, Lynd urged the movement to dig in and sharpen its focus on building a resistance movement against the draft. In little more than a year, dramatic scenes of confrontation would play out across the country as the war continued to escalate, and the movement which Lynd help to build became a political force with no parallel in U.S. history.⁹⁰

Note on the Author

Luke Stewart is a historian who has lectured at the University of Nantes, Le Mans University, and Sciences Po Lille in France. His Ph.D. at the University of Waterloo focused on the use of the Nuremberg Principles of 1950 and other domestic and international laws by draft and military resisters in their opposition to the Vietnam War. He is the editor of the forthcoming collection *My Country is the World: Staughton Lynd's Writings, Speeches, Statements and Interviews Against the Vietnam War* (Haymarket Books). He has co-edited *Let Them Stay: U.S. War Resisters in Canada, 2004-2016* (Toronto: Iguana Books, 2016, with Sarah Hipworth). His scholarly articles in journals include, “‘Hell, they’re your problem, not ours’: Draft Dodgers, Military Deserters and Canada-

⁹⁰ Staughton Lynd, Text of the Address at Second International Days of Protest, March 26, 1966, Series 2, Box 6, Folder 20, SLC, KSU-SCA.

United States Relations in the Vietnam War Era,” *Études Canadiennes/Canadian Studies*; “Too Loud to Rise Above the Silence: The United States v. The International War Crimes Tribunal, 1966–1967,” *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture*; “‘I Quit!’ The Vietnam War and the Early Antiwar Activism of Master Sergeant Donald Duncan,” *Revue française d’études américaines*; and “The re-writing of history: The misuse of the draft ‘dodger’ myth against Iraq war resisters in Canada,” *Active History*. His book chapter, “Rewriting History: Iraq War Resisters’ Struggle for Asylum in Canada and the Mythology of Vietnam,” was published in *Worth Fighting For: Canada’s Tradition of War Resistance from 1812 to the War on Terror* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2015).