

By FRANK CORMIER
WASHINGTON (AP) President Johnson is pleased with the results so far of his Viet Nam peace offensive. He is confident the travels of his special peace envoys are having global impact still largely hidden behind a curtain of diplomatic secrecy.

Although there has been no outward evidence of a favorable response from Hanoi, Johnson remains hopeful of a breakthrough.

On the hopeful side, word has come through diplomatic channels that many countries visited by such traveling American diplomats as W. Averell Harriman and Arthur J. Goldberg are getting in direct touch with Hanoi — to urge steps toward peace.

Diplomatic traffic with the Communist government of North Viet Nam has reached a new peak since the concerted American peace effort began.

Some of this hidden diplomatic intervention has come from countries skeptical in the past about American policy.

If Hanoi remains deaf to such appeals, Johnson believes his efforts, at the very least, will reinforce his claim that if there are obstacles to peace, the blame lies elsewhere.

In a sense, the Johnson peace offensive has been a developing thing, with the President personally ordering each new move, often on short notice.

It was shaped with the passage of time as Johnson made a succession of major decisions in which his politician's sense of timing has played a great role.

The peace campaign had its beginning — in secrecy — at a Nov. 11 conference at the LBJ Ranch in Texas. Gathered at the comfortable ranch house on the banks of the Pedernales were the President, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, and presidential assistants McGeorge Bundy and Jack Valenti.

For many weeks, the administration had given periodic thought to a possible pause in American bombings of North Viet Nam as a potential means of dramatizing U.S. hopes for peace and, hopefully, encouraging a conciliatory response from Hanoi.

Johnson returned to Washington Dec. 13 for a series of meetings with foreign visitors: President Mohammad Ayub Khan of Pakistan, Prime Minister Harold Wilson of Britain and Char-

cellor Ludwig Erhard of West Germany.

Even as these international meetings progressed, Johnson was preoccupied with potential peace moves in Viet Nam. Sandwiched among his conferences with the visitors were meetings with top advisers, including two secret sessions with the National Security Council.

Out of these talks grew a decision — subject to ratification by the Saigon government — to propose a 30-hour Christmas cease-fire. The Viet Cong's political arm had called earlier on Dec. 7, for a 12-hour truce.

On Dec. 22, with Johnson back at the ranch, military officials in Saigon ordered the cease-fire. As part of this holiday package, American planes were to halt their bombing runs over North Viet Nam targets.

Even at this point, Johnson was not certain of his next move. Much would depend on immediate developments. For example, he knew that if the cease-fire ended in some incident like the Viet Cong bombing months earlier of the U. S. Embassy in Saigon, full warfare would have to be resumed. And the President wanted a chance to gauge American reaction to the Christmas lull before committing himself further.

One opportunity for a quick move toward peace evaporated when the Viet Cong repeatedly ignored the 30-hour cease-fire, nullifying a Johnson decision that fighting would not be resumed even after Christmas unless the other side fired first.

For two days after Christmas, Johnson made day-to-day decisions against resuming the bombing of North Viet Nam, although ground fighting was back in full swing.

Ultimately, on the night of Dec. 27, the President made up his mind that — if events permitted — he had the perfect opportunity to prolong the bombing lull. It was in keeping with the Christmas spirit and might advance the effort he had pledged anew in toasting Erhard at a White House dinner a week earlier: "We will push on every door for peace."

Pope Paul VI and Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield may have influenced his decision. Both had called for a fighting lull extending well beyond Christmas.

Up to this point, Johnson had

tried to stay very much in the background — a silent man who insisted that such questions as holiday lulls were matters to be decided in Saigon.

In these opening stages, the peace offensive was not tied directly to the White House — lest something go wrong and Johnson feel compelled to pull back.

On Dec. 28, Johnson made the first move to expand his peace efforts manifold and, ultimately, to bring them into the open.

At noon, Johnson put through a telephone call to U. N. Ambassador Goldberg, sunning himself on a beach in the Bahamas. The President ordered him to fly to the Vatican for a meeting with Pope Paul. A presidential jet flew Goldberg back to New York that night and, after a stopover that included a session with U. N. Secretary-General U Thant, the envoy was bound for Rome.

Roving Ambassador Harriman, a durable 74 with 20 years of cold war diplomacy behind him, got a Johnson call at about the same time: fly to Warsaw, Poland, for talks with the leaders of that Communist country which, along with Canada and India, is represented on the International Control Commission responsible for overseeing the 1954 Geneva "settlement" of the Viet Nam problem. Harriman had to duck out on a bridge game to make the flight.

Soon others were catching planes for distant places: Bundy for Canada; Undersecretary of State Thomas C. Mann for Mexi-

co; assistant Secretary of State G. Mennen Williams for Africa.

The Far Eastern good-will mission of Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, scheduled earlier, was expanded to encompass talk of Viet Nam with leaders in Japan, the Philippines, Nationalist China and South Korea. The U. S. ambassador in Moscow, Foy Kohler, paid an unusually long "courtesy call" on Soviet President Nikolai V. Podgorny.

Johnson's "peace doves" already have visited or scheduled stops in two dozen countries. More are being added and the envoys apparently will be circulating for at least another week.

Everywhere they are emphasizing what Humphrey called the American "peace basket proposals" — 14 items adding up to an administration view that virtually any difficulty in Viet Nam is negotiable, if only Hanoi will start talking.

The response from North Viet Nam, as reflected in public statements, has been distantly negative. Epithets like "peace trick" are heard every few days.

With all that, Johnson knows his message is getting to Hanoi — and he still is waiting. For how long, no one knows.

Neither can anyone here judge now the result of the visit to Hanoi by Alexander Shelepin, a top Soviet Communist party official. Shelepin may join the growing chorus of those calling for peace — or he may offer new aid for the North Vietnamese war effort.



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