

37

JULY 12, 1967 - 1:05 p.m.

McNAMARA REPORT ON TRIP TO VIETNAM

Sec. Rusk
Sec. McNamara
UnSec. Katzenbach
CIA Dir. Helms
General Taylor
Clark Clifford

Walt Rostow
Harry McPherson
William Leonhart
Robert Komer
Tom Johnson
George Christian

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XERO

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET~~

LITERALLY EYES ONLY

July 12, 1967

7:30 p.m.

MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT

FROM: **Tom**
Tom Johnson

Attached is a report of the President's meeting in the Cabinet Room today to hear Secretary McNamara report on his mission to Vietnam.

Attending the meeting:

The President
Secretary Dean Rusk
Secretary Robert McNamara
Under Secretary Nicholas Katzenbach
Mr. Richard Helms
General Maxwell Taylor
Mr. Clark Clifford
Mr. Walt Rostow
Mr. Harry McPherson
Mr. William Leonhart
Mr. Robert Komer
Mr. Tom Johnson
Mr. George Christian

The meeting began at 1:05. It ended at 2:38 p.m.

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NLS 82-42

By cc, NARS, Date 11-7-83

~~TOP SECRET~~

LITERALLY EYES ONLY

SERVICE SET

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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July 12, 1967

Notes from Meeting of the President with Secretary McNamara
to Review the Secretary's Findings during Vietnam Trip

Secretary McNamara said he "reviewed all aspects of operations
in Vietnam, economic, political and military."

On the economic front he reported:

- Progress was measurable since his last trip.
- The port situation was operating smoothly.
- The import situation has stabilized.
- Threat of "run away" inflation has been reduced.

The Secretary said that the number of barges which have been
backed up in ports because of poor port operations had been
reduced from 800 on his last trip to 30-40 on this trip.

On the political front, the Secretary reported:

- The "greatest danger" is facing us.
- A possible split between Ky and Thieu.
- There is "no real accommodation" between the two men.
- There is no real division of responsibility between the two men.
- Ky is restive, wants more authority.
- There currently is no means for Ky to attain authority.
- Ky may not support the ticket in the upcoming elections.

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- 2 -

On the personnel area, the Secretary reported:

- The Embassy is operating "the best I have seen it."
- Bunker is in full control.
- Bunker and his staff are effective in dealing with Ky and Thieu.
- The senior military leadership is strong.
- Komer and his pacification program have exceeded expectations.
- Komer has motivated his people quite well.

On the military front, the Secretary reported:

- Operations are proceeding well.
- Reports on the scene are better than press reports at home.
- There is no reason to expect significant military losses by the Viet Cong in coming months.
- "There is not a military stalemate."
- Long stretches of highways have been opened for travel and feeder roads are opening up.

On the pacification subject, the Secretary reported:

- There has been progress
- The progress has exceeded his expectations.
- The progress is slow however.
- The Secretary expects nothing dramatic in the next six months.

On the military operations, the Secretary proposed that:

- There should be an increase to battalion size operations in Laos.

~~EYES ONLY~~

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- 3 -

-- U. S. forces must watch Cambodia and the infiltration routes in that area.

Secretary McNamara said the President had asked Secretary Katzenbach and him to ensure the need for complete unity among the South Vietnamese military leadership and emphasize that the elections must be free and honest.

Secretary McNamara: Ky and Thieu are of the attitude that they will do what we want them to do on the matter of negotiations. He said the U. S. will have no trouble with Ky and Thieu if bona fide negotiations have to be tied to stopping of the bombing in North Vietnam. He said, however, they would not settle for a Korean-type negotiation.

Secretary McNamara said the press in Vietnam is in a "very bad mood." They are cynical, skeptical and think we have a military stalemate. They believe pacification is at a standstill. They view the election with cynicism and skepticism. Secretary McNamara said Ambassador Bunker anticipates a bad press for the next six months.

Secretary McNamara said the press in Vietnam believes that the war isn't worth the price we are incurring. They believe the people to be corrupt. They believe that the Vietnamese Government cannot be stabilized politically.

Secretary Katzenbach made the following points on the press:

- He agreed with Secretary McNamara.
- The press does not feel the Vietnamese are doing their part of the job.
- Press feels that corruption is getting worse and worse.
- Press is cynical about the elections because they believe the same government will continue in office.
- He said many of the correspondents have "been out there too long."

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- 4 -

On the subject of additional troops, Secretary McNamara reported:

-- General Westmoreland and his staff want 100,000 troops.

-- The General and his staff believe that we will continue to make progress without that large a number but that the progress will continue at a slower than optimum rate.

If U. S. troops tighten up, Secretary McNamara said "we can get by with less."

-- There is some waste and slippage.

-- Westmoreland and his people agree there is some slippage.

-- McNamara said U. S. could put civilians in military jobs, particularly in construction battalions and by asking the Koreans to send more troops to support their 21 battalions which are currently in Vietnam.

-- McNamara said 5,000 troops could be picked up by substituting Koreans for U. S. troops who currently are in support of Korean units.

-- The ^{South}~~North~~ Vietnamese could do more by:

a. Extending tours of service beyond the current three-year requirement.

b. Reduce draft ages from 20 to 18.

The Australians, Thais, Koreans, New Zealanders and Filipinos should be asked to carry more of their share of the burden. The Secretary said he was referring to combat troops.

On the subject of morale, the Secretary reported that he is more impressed than ever by the U. S. forces there. He said that morale is superb and their fighting ability highly effective.

On the subject of food, the Secretary reported that there are no problems. The food is excellent. Men in remote combat units receive two hot meals per day.

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- 5 -

On the medical front, the Secretary reported that there were absolutely no problems. He said the units are well equipped and that the supplies and medical items exceeded demand.

The Secretary said there were no shortages of clothes or other personal equipment items.

The Secretary's only suggestion for equipment change was for more Marine ground equipment. He said the field commanders would like more helicopters, but pointed out that during this year U. S. forces will add 800 more helicopters than U. S. forces will lose.

The Secretary said that there were two serious technical problems:

-- Night vision is the single biggest problem. New technology is being developed, but nothing yet has offered any major breakthrough.

-- There is poor targeting at night because of the night vision problem. Night air missions are primarily "noisy" because they often fail to hit the targets.

-- Pacification is a serious problem because it is difficult to detect who is a Viet Cong and who is not. On this, the Secretary said the current means of identifying individuals and their loyalties is, at best, "sloppy."

On the subject of re-enlistments, the Secretary reported:

-- Re-enlistments are higher than expected.

-- Military advisors turn over more rapidly than we would like.

-- The senior officers complain because they want their families with them. This is the reason many want to return home rather than re-enlist.

On the subject of R and R (rest and relaxation), the Secretary reported:

-- There is very little.

-- For the average combat unit their mission requires them to be in the field 7 days a week, 12 months of the year with only a 5 day out-of-the-country leave and some time back at base camp.

[5 of 16]

~~EYES ONLY~~

- 6 -

On corruption in Vietnam, the Secretary reported:

- It is widespread
- We do not have an effective program to counter it.

On psychological warfare, the Secretary reported:

- The program is not well managed.
- The forces are seeking to improve it.

On the bombing policy, the Secretary reported:

- The commanders want no restrictions.
- The commanders want an intensification and escalation of the bombing.
- The commanders want to mine the port areas.
- The military commanders want to attack the port areas.
- The military leaders would like to attack further the industrial base of Vietnam.

On bombing policy, the Secretary said that the military commanders think there have been much more results since the Secretary's last trip. The Secretary said he did not agree.

The Secretary said "we have destroyed more, but what we destroyed has less effect on the war effort in the South."

The Secretary said bombing of railways has had less effect because the capacity of the rail lines is greater than the flow requirements. He said that what has been destroyed in rail targeting also has had very little effect on the war in the south.

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- 7 -

The Secretary said that the Air Commanders are doing a good job on tactical air programs. The Air Commanders want to reduce the circles of restriction around Hanoi and Haiphong. They want to hit the ports with mines and "shoulder the ships out."

The Secretary reported that U. S. forces had wiped out about 80% of the power capacity in North Vietnam, but that the North Vietnamese are using mobile generators.

The Secretary reported he had talked with Ky and Thieu about:

- Lowering the draft age
- Extending service tours
- Improving current programs underway

The Secretary said that Ambassador Locke is preparing a manpower program to increase the effective use of Vietnamese power.

~~EYES ONLY~~

- 8 -

II.

General Wheeler reported to the President:

- There is no military stalemate.
- There has been an unbroken series of military successes.
- The enemy continues to be off balance.
- The North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong continue their initiatives in the demilitarized zone and in the central highlands but these initiatives are being effectively countered.
- The Marines in the DMZ clobbered Viet Cong units last week killing 900 and forcing a pull back by the opposing forces.
- The logistical arrangements are excellent.
- There are no great military problems in sight.
- In the 2nd Corps area the military commander reported to General Wheeler that 86% of the population is under control by allied forces and 85% of the roads.
- In the Delta, slow progress is being made.
- There is evidence that the Viet Cong are getting very "low in the barrel" in their recruiting.
- 13 to 16 year old kids have been found among the corpses of Viet Cong units in the South, indicating the difficulties being faced by the Viet Cong in replacing their manpower.
- The South Vietnamese Army units are "spotty."
- The South Vietnamese are under strength.

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- 9 -

On the subject of U.S. forces, General Wheeler reported:

- The morale of the U.S. troops is absolutely superb.
- The performance of U.S. troops under adverse climatic conditions is excellent.
- A new drug has been developed which takes care of 50% of the severe malaria cases.
- A close watch is necessary to prevent severe cases of trench foot. (Wheeler said after 48 hours of wet conditions, it is necessary to pull the men out of their situation in order for them to dry their feet.)
- The medical units are doing an excellent job.

On the matter of bombing policy, General Wheeler reported:

- Disagreement with Secretary McNamara.
- During the good weather of the first half of 1967, substantial destruction has been taking place in water craft, trucks, and railroad strikes.
- The northern railroad lines have been hit hard.
- The northeast line was struck 92 times, closed for 3 days, and much shuttling was required.

General Wheeler recommended:

- That bombing restrictions around Hanoi be reduced to a 10 mile limit.
- That bombing restrictions around Haiphong be reduced to a 4 mile limit.

~~EYES ONLY~~

EYES ONLY

-10 -

- No attacks on shipping were recommended.
- Armed aerial reconnaissance from the Chinese buffer zone on down was recommended.

General Wheeler pointed out that the Mark 36 weapons were being used effectively in inland waterways to interdict forces.

Secretary McNamara pointed out the Mark 36 can be adjusted and detonated by the movement of metal objects above it and is much more effective than mines of earlier periods.

General Wheeler summed up his report by saying:

- There is no stalemate.
- The morale of the men is outstanding.
- The performance of the Army of the South Vietnamese is fair and must be improved.
- The U.S. and the allies should continue maximum pressure. The method is unrelenting pressure.
- There has been steady progress.

III.

William Leonhart reported to the President that there is a strong need for more people in AID programs and in pacification effort. The President directed Secretary Katzenback to see what could be done on this in conjunction with AID Director William Gaud.

IV.

On pacification, Robert Komer reported to the President:

EYES ONLY

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- 11 -

- That he was more encouraged than when he left about pacification in general.
- That recruiting of Viet Cong seems to be very much a case of attrition.
- That a study under way indicated it would show that the Viet Cong are recruiting about 3500 ~~more~~ a month compared to 7000 a month when a previous study on recruitment was made.
- That under these circumstances it was becoming more of a "classical war" where north verses south rather than a situation where there was strong internal conflict in the south by the Viet Cong against the South Vietnamese.
- U.S. and allied forces are imposing some sort of ^{ceiling} ~~selling~~ on the numbers of individuals who are infiltrating.

On the political front, Komer reported:

- There is a lower level of competence in the GVN.
- Komer said it is a situation where they are "smart crooks, rather than dumb honest men."
- Komer said "We may not be backing the right horse."
- He suggested that perhaps the U.S. should be supporting civilian candidates for the ticket rather than military candidates.
- Komer suggested that a civilian leadership would "get the military back into the battlefield where they belong."
- Civilians would be perhaps less corrupt although not necessarily more effective.

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- 12 -

- Komer said he was discouraged by the political outlook.
- He said there must be a half decent government in Vietnam to back the pacification effort.
- He said a military leadership is better, though not much better.
- He said we need more U.S. advisors in a more direct U.S. role in directing the Vietnamese military.

V.

Clark Clifford pointed out that public sentiment in this country sometimes calls the Vietnamese conflict "the war that can't be won." He asked Secretary McNamara, is that true.

Secretary McNamara reported:

- U.S. units will continue to destroy the enemy's main forces units.
- There is a limit to what the enemy can send in to the South.
- The U.S. units are destroying a significant capacity of the large units.
- For the first time Secretary McNamara said he felt that if we follow the same program we will win the war and end the fighting.
- Hanoi is testing the unity and patience of the American people.

VI.

Richard Helms said an important issue which should be considered by all of the individuals in the room is what kind of political program

EYES ONLY

- 13 -

should be after the elections. He said more consideration should be given to a political program by the Vietnamese which eventually will permit the withdrawal of U.S. forces and U.S. direction.

VII.

Reporting on his findings during the Vietnam trip, Secretary Katzenbach reported:

- U.S. and allied forces can win depending on the performance, if we get it, of the government of Vietnam.
- Ambassador Bunker has taken firm control. He knows what he is doing.
- The service time of U.S. civilian personnel out there must be extended.
- Many of the senior officials feel, as Secretary McNamara said, that they need their wives and families with them in order for them to stay in Vietnam longer.
- There is a need for more young political officers. In general, our policy has not been aggressive enough in getting these people in.

The President asked Secretary Katzenbach to undertake a complete study of this subject, and to arrange for a meeting with the President on this topic next week. Secretary Katzenbach said we have got to get more people out there, but it is a very dirty, very risky job. He pointed out how inspired he was by a meeting with some of the political officers in the field.

Secretary Katzenbach said he would rate the U.S. effort in Vietnam as a "B" in many areas. He said the political situation was "hairy." Continuing his report, Secretary Katzenbach reported:

- Ky is bitter.
- The government could fall apart.

EYES ONLY

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- 14 -

- There is only about two to three weeks left for the U.S. to work on the political situation.
- Katzenbach said that this government must be "guarantors" of an agreement between Ky and Thieu which will be mutually satisfying and agreeable to the two men.
- He said, personally, he would rate the U.S. support behind the two men (Ky and Thieu) rather than one of the others.

In summarizing, Secretary Katzenbach made these points:

- He agreed with General Wheeler that the military pressure must be kept on.
- He said he did not want to expand the military activities to bomb the harbors.
- He said he would go along with General Wheeler's recommendations for similar restrictions around Hanoi and Haiphong.
- He said he did not favor a pause in the bombing without a further indication from Hanoi of what it would do in return.
- He said this is not the point in time for a bombing pause.
- At some point, Katzenbach said we may have to call their bluff and do it.
- The pacification effort is slow. You cannot do it instantly.

The President asked about the pay of the Vietnamese forces. Secretary McNamara pointed out that it was very poor, particularly that of the popular forces. The President directed Secretary McNamara to make a full study of this. Secretary McNamara reported that one was already under way.

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- 15 -

VIII

Secretary Rusk said that compared with Greece, Berlin, the early days of 1942, that the Vietnamese war is "passed that stage."

He said, "We are going to come through this thing." He pointed out that we must get the American people to realize that the U. S. forces are going to come through this.

EYES ONLY

- 16 -

IXI.

The President said that there is an attitude in this country today that we are not doing all we should to get the war over as quickly as it should be.

The President said that although we have lost 10,000 men in Vietnam that he is constantly reminded that the North Vietnamese have lost more in 60 days than we have lost in the past 6 years. The President said we cannot get it over in 60 days but we must make every effort to try to do what we can.

The President said the U. S. people do think, perhaps, that the war cannot be won. The President said he was more frightened by this than by the Thieu-Ky difficulties. He pointed out that Ky has been Number One and Thieu Number Two for several years, and perhaps some accommodation can be reached with a division of responsibility.

The President said he agreed that we need more troops, but he urged his advisors to "shave it the best we can."

The President said he would be talking with General Westmoreland later today on the troop matter. The President said that more men will have to be put in but the question of how many will be discussed with a number of people, including General Westmoreland.

The President said we must see what we can get out of the Thais, the Koreans and our other allies. The President said he may ask Clark Clifford and General Maxwell Taylor to go out on a Presidential mission to talk with the leadership of the allies, including Prime Minister Holt of Australia.

Secretary Katzenbach concluded by saying that if the American people gave us a chance here at home, that he had every reason to believe that we could win the war in the field.