

March 26, 1968

SUMMARY OF NOTES

McGeorge Bundy: There is a very significant shift in our position. When we last met we saw reasons for hope.

We hoped then there would be slow but steady progress. Last night and today the picture is not so hopeful particularly in the country side.

Dean Acheson summed up the majority feeling when he said that we can no longer do the job we set out to do in the time we have left and we must begin to take steps to disengage.

That view was shared by:

George Ball  
Arthur Dean  
Cy Vance  
Douglas Dillon  
and myself (McGeorge Bundy)

We do think we should do everything possible to strengthen in a real and visable way the performance of the Government of South Vietnam.

There were three of us who took a different position:

General Bradley  
General Taylor  
Bob Murphy

They all feel that we should not act to weaken our position and we should do what our military commanders suggest.

General Ridgeway has a special point of view. He wanted to so strengthen the Army of South Vietnam that we could complete the job in two years.

On negotiations, Ball, Goldberg and Vance strongly urged a cessation of the bombing now. Others wanted a halt at some point but not now while the situation is still unresolved in the I Corps area.

On troop reinforcements the dominant sentiment was that the burden of proof rests with those who are urging the increase. Most of us think there should be a substantial escalation. We all felt there should not be an extension of the conflict. This would be against our national interest.

The use of atomic weapons is unthinkable.

March 26, 1968

Summary:

Ridgeway: I agree with the summary as presented by McGeorge Bundy.

Dean: I agree. All of us got the impression that there is no military conclusion in sight. We felt time is running out.

Dean Acheson: Agree with Bundy's presentation. Neither the effort of the Government of Vietnam or the effort of the U. S. government can succeed in the time we have left. Time is limited by reactions in this country. We cannot build an independent South Vietnam; therefore, we should do something by no later than late summer to establish something different.

Henry Cabot Lodge: We should shift from search and destroy strategy to a strategy of using our military power as a shield to permit the South Vietnamese society to develop as well as North Vietnamese society has been able to do. We need to organize South Vietnam on a block-by-block, precinct-by-precinct basis.

Douglas Dillon: We should change the emphasis. I agree with Acheson. The briefing last night led me to conclude we cannot achieve a military victory. I would agree with Lodge that we should cease search-and-destroy tactics and head toward an eventual disengagement. I would send only the troops necessary to support those there now.

George Ball: I share Acheson's view. I have felt that way since 1961 -- that our objectives are not attainable. In the U.S. there is a sharp division of opinion. In the world, we look very badly because of the bombing. That is the central defect in our position. The disadvantages of bombing outweigh the advantages. We need to stop the bombing in the next six weeks to test the will of the North Vietnamese. As long as we continue to bomb, we alienate ourselves from the civilized world. I would have the Pope or U Thant suggest the bombing halt. It cannot come from the President.

A bombing halt would quieten the situation here at home.

Cy Vance: McGeorge Bundy stated my views. I agree with George Ball.

SERVICE SET



Unless we do something quick, the mood in this country may lead us to withdrawal. On troops, we should send no more than the 13,000 support troops.

General Bradley: People in the country are dissatisfied. We do need to stop the bombing if we can get the suggestion to come from the Pope or U Thant, but let's not show them that we are in any way weakening. We should send only support troops.

Bob Murphy: I am shaken by the position of my associates. The interpretation given this action by Saigon would be bad. This is a "give-away" policy. I think it would weaken our position.

General Taylor: I am dismayed. The picture I get is a very different one from that you have. Let's not concede the home front; let's do something about it.'

Fortas: The U.S. has never had in mind winning a military victory out there; we always have wanted to reach an agreement or settle for the status quo between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. I agree with General Taylor and Bob Murphy. This is not the time for an overture on our part. I do not think a cessation of the bombing would do any good at this time. I do not believe in drama for the sake of drama.

Acheson: The issue is not that stated by Fortas. The issue is can we do what we are trying to do in Vietnam. I do not think we can. Fortas said we are not trying to win a military victory. The issue is can we by military means keep the North Vietnamese off the South Vietnamese. I do not think we can. They can slip around and end-run them and crack them up.

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SECRET

THE WHITE HOUSE

Don't study for  
Country side - just to  
Change of statement in  
the country - clear cut statement  
to put us set

Can no longer to  
but to do  
budget over course  
move to  
Bill  
Dean  
Vance  
Goldberg  
Brinkley

Referring  
to our initiative  
Shirley AVM

Bradley  
Taylor  
Murphy

Acherson  
So much like some it can be  
What we set out to do.  
Military history

SERVICE SET

From Pres's desk  
Mar 27, 1968

(Pres has seen any  
dist since 3/15/68)



Cost of work, overtime - Report analysis

1. Cost of authority (Steering com)
2. " " information - where it needs to be done

John	32	}
K	42	
me	17	

me	17
Q	30
K	38
(Don't know)	15

21/31 - 48K

eval office  
mar 26, 1968

United States Senate  
Office of the Majority Leader  
Washington, D.C.

March 13, 1968

SUBJECT: Reports of requests for an additional 200,000 men in Viet Nam.

It seems to me that requests for any increase above the 525,000 assigned level ought to be resisted. That does not mean we have to get out of Viet Nam. It does mean we have to concentrate and consolidate the already great commitment which we have there. It means the adoption of a patient strategy--less destructive of the country and of our forces and less voracious in the consumption of our resources. It means a strategy designed not to conquer what was never Saigon's, even in its best days--that is, absolute control over south Viet Nam--but rather to hold a strong and tenable position at the present or even a lower level of American involvement, for purposes of negotiating a decent settlement of the conflict. It means to stay out of the Delta with American forces and out of inaccessible and hard to defend regions. Our position for a negotiated settlement, it seems to me, will be no worse and it may well be better if we consolidate and concentrate rather than deepen and spread our involvement in South Viet Nam with another great increment in men on the ground.

RECEIVED



Attached herewith is a list of specific consequences which I believe will follow a substantial increase in our troop levels in Viet Nam. It seems to me that these consequences will arise regardless of the size of any further increase. In my judgment it is too late in the day to try to make the present course more acceptable by giving the Saigon Command something less in the way of forces than it is reported to have requested.

United States Senate  
Office of the Majority Leader  
Washington, D.C.

March 13, 1968

Domestic Consequences

1. A war at the present level in Viet Nam is difficult enough to explain to the people of the nation. An expanded war, with more American forces involved, is going to be that much harder to explain.

2. If the increase requires substantial reserve and national guard call-ups, higher draft calls and lengthening of enlistments, as it well might, then we could begin to run into serious resistance to military service at home.

3. An increase will raise the financial cost of the war and, in the present mood of the Congress, there is little inclination to begin to meet even the cost of the present level by an increase in taxes. In the end that means more inflation, more balance of payments complication, and possibly financial panic and collapse.

4. There is no prospect of getting the concentration of public attention and resources which are sought for meeting domestic ills--particularly in the urban areas--while the war keeps eating up more and more of both.

Consequences in Viet Nam

1. Past experience indicates that an increase in our force levels in Viet Nam will raise the level of violence on both sides in the war. Damage to property will spread. Casualties will go up; civilian injuries will increase, as will the flood of refugees which, in the end, must be cared for out of our resources.
2. The war will be even more Americanized and in the process, more South Vietnamese will be alienated.
3. An increase in American forces is an invitation to the South Vietnamese military to cut proportionately their own military efforts.
4. An increase in U. S. force levels is not likely to prove any more militarily decisive than past increases; the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong have the manpower to counterbalance the increase even as they have had the resources in the past.
5. An increase may provide incentive to Saigon to try to end the war by increasing the military pressures along the borders, even if this means going on the ground beyond the DMZ or the Laotian or Cambodian borders. It is interesting in this connection to note that Saigon is reportedly preparing South Vietnamese units to operate in North Viet Nam. Far from ending the war, this pressure if it should materialize, is likely to result in its enlargement and in the preparation of the ground for the next major expansion.



6. An increase in our force level will not improve our bargaining position, even if by some chance we should reach the negotiating table. Two hundred thousand more men spread throughout South Viet Nam on the basis of the present strategy of trying to gain control of the entire country are not going to have much effect on stability and security and they are going to put the Saigon government into an even more irrelevant role with respect to its own people.

Diplomatic-International

1. An announcement of another increase will probably cancel for the time being third party efforts to bring about negotiations.
2. It is likely to bring a new wave of adverse reactions from third countries and world moral leaders.
3. The loss of prestige which we have suffered as a result of Viet Nam will not be stopped by going further along the same course.
4. A further step-up in our commitment of forces may well result in calls from Hanoi for more assistance from China and the Soviet Union and more diversionary mischief in places like Korea and Formosa, if not elsewhere in the world.

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

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Mr. President

The Senate --- by a vote of 33 to 56 --  
defeated the Russell Long amendment  
to the Williams-Smathers "package"  
which would have struck everything  
but the 10% excise tax.

Mike Manatos/mjdr  
Mar 26, 1968  
3:50p

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