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Profile

Monday, August 7, 1967 -- 2:45 p.m.

Mr. President:

Herewith a response to Sen. Mansfield's various points as reported in AP 92-93.

1. Stop bombing North Viet Nam and concentrate on blocking infiltration at the 17th parallel.

-- All the evidence we have indicates bombing North Viet Nam (and Laos) helps cut down the level of infiltration below the level it would otherwise attain. Several prisoners report that bombing results in the loss of more than half those whom they infiltrate.

-- The latest CIA estimate -- and the CIA has been cautious about this -- reads as follows in discussing a cessation of bombing in North Viet Nam: "Large numbers of the 500,000 to 700,000 people now engaged in repair programs and countermeasures to air attack could be released for agricultural work and for duty in South Vietnam. The infiltration of men and supplies into South Vietnam would become immeasurably easier -- reinforcement of enemy forces south of the DMZ would be particularly facilitated. Morale would probably improve among North Vietnam's populace. In short, Hanoi could turn its attention and its assets much more fully to the conflict in South Vietnam."

-- The truth is that, with present methods, infiltration cannot be blocked at the 17th parallel, given the complex routes of infiltration via Laos, Cambodia, the western part of the DMZ, and by sea. It can be harassed and limited by our operations against the North.

2. Construction of a defensive barrier.

Senator Mansfield should know that we are working at absolute top priority to develop the technology for what is called a "barrier." In fact, it will mainly consist of complex devices that will permit us to harass and attack infiltrators more efficiently. Given the terrain -- including some very steep mountains in the western part of the DMZ -- a simple barrier is not technically feasible. If all goes well, we hope to begin putting this barrier in during the autumn. It will take some months before we will know how effective it can be made.

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

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By Saw/ISA, NARA, Date 10/14/92

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3. A peace initiative in the UN Security Council.

We know that U Thant advises against bringing Viet Nam question into the UN; and we have tried before. The heart of the matter is not the UN, however, but what the USSR can and will do. You raised this as hard as you could with Kosygin at Hollybush. We shall see in the weeks and months ahead whether anything emerges. It is possible that Hanoi and Moscow -- as well as ourselves -- are waiting for the Vietnamese election and the emergence of a new government.

4. Senator Mansfield refers to further escalation in which the enemy can match and outmatch us."

The evidence is that the Viet Cong are having severe manpower problems in the south and facing real difficulties in maintaining both their guerrilla and their main force units. From captured documents we know they estimate that they lost at least 1 million Vietnamese from under Viet Cong control in the course of 1966 and the trend continues. The North Vietnamese forces in the south have had to be used to fill in, to some extent, for Viet Cong losses. In addition, they have pushed forces across the DMZ drawing on short lines of supply in order to divert our forces from helping the South Vietnamese in extending security to the local population. While our Marines in I Corps have taken casualties, they have inflicted very heavy casualties, so much so that major North Vietnamese units have had to be pulled back across the DMZ for rest and refit. That is why I Corps has been quiet and U. S. casualties have fallen in recent weeks.

In short, the evidence does not support the doctrine that they can easily throw manpower in to meet the pressure that we have been mounting on them: the bombing ties up perhaps 700, 000; bombing imposes a limited on infiltration; and the manpower pressure is increasing in the south. That is why it is necessary to continue all of these pressures, and especially to accelerate the pace of pacification, ^{is why} that the Vietnamese and the other fighting allies all agree that we need more forces at this critical turning point period.

5. All the evidence we have indicates that Hanoi does not now expect to win the war in the South on the battlefield. They are hanging on hoping that there will be a break in the will of the U. S. to continue the war. Some observers continue to report that they still are thinking in terms of the November 1968 election. If there is any hope that they will decide that the

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game is not worth the candle before that time, it lies in maintaining the pressure on the north; dealing with the North Vietnamese that come across the DMZ; and building up the pacification effort which, despite what the newspapers and television say, is making headway. (If Senator Mansfield wants evidence for this, he should note that the absolute top priority of the Viet Cong is the revolutionary development cadres who are the spearhead of this effort. They are obviously doing a good job. Thieu and Ky told Clifford and Taylor that they plan to double them as well as to add 65,000 men to the Vietnamese armed forces.)

W. W. Rostow

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