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EYES ONLY -- TOP SECRET

Tuesday, November 7, 1967
11:40 a.m.

Pres file

Mr. President:

Herewith Clark Clifford responds
to the draft memorandum of November 1.

W. W. Rostow

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WWRostow:rln

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NLJ 83-55
By sis, NARS, Date 10-4-83

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MEMORANDUM

I disagree with the recommendations presented in the memorandum of November 1, 1967. I believe that the course of action suggested therein will retard the possibility of concluding the conflict rather than accelerating it.

The question is often asked: Why does North Vietnam continue to prosecute the war when it appears that they have no chance of winning it?

The answer is clear. Hanoi is depending upon a weakening of the will of the United States to carry on the war. Their previous experience with the French has convinced them that the same result will occur again insofar as the United States is concerned.

It is my opinion that Hanoi will never seek a cessation of the conflict if they think our determination is lessening. On the other hand, if our pressure is unremitting and their losses continue to grow, and hope fades for any sign of weakening on our part, then some day they will conclude that the game is not worth the candle.

If one accepts this premise, then the course of action recommended in the memorandum must be subjected to the test of Hanoi's reaction.

It is suggested in the memo that there be "complete cessation of

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bombing in the North." The argument is made that "it is probable that Hanoi would move to 'talks' perhaps within a few weeks after the bombing stopped."

I am at a loss to understand this logic. Would the unconditional suspension of the bombing, without any effort to extract a quid pro quo persuade Hanoi that we were firm and unyielding in our conviction to force them to desist from their aggressive designs?

The answer is a loud and resounding "no."

It would be interpreted by Hanoi as (a) evidence of our discouragement and frustration, and (b) an admission of the wrongness and immorality of our bombing of the North, and (c) the first step in our ultimate total disengagement from the conflict.

It would give an enormous lift to the spirits and morale of the North, and an equally grave setback to the will and determination of the South Vietnamese and our other allies fighting with us.

It would dramatically confirm the conviction of the North that Premier Pham Van Dong was correct when he said, "Americans do not like long, inconclusive wars; thus we are sure to win in the end."

The cessation of the bombing would be used to great advantage to repair roads and bridges, improve anti-aircraft defenses, and build up the war-making potential of the North. The Chinese and Russians would

react enthusiastically to such cessation and would redouble their efforts to drive us out of Asia.

I think it is reckless to talk about resuming the bombing after such a suspension. It would create a storm of protest, which would be compounded by our greater losses of men and planes due to their improved air defenses.

I feel strongly that it is grossly fallacious to contend that we are fighting two wars: the war in the South and a separate war in the North. They are part and parcel of our single effort to convince Hanoi that it must abandon its effort to conquer South Vietnam.

The second recommendation in the memo is that we "stabilize" our military effort in the South.

This would be achieved by stating "publicly" that we would not increase our forces; we would not call up reserves; we would not expand ground action in North Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia; we would not attack North Vietnam seaports; we would not hit the dikes or locks; and we would engage in continued efforts to restrict the war.

Can there by any doubt as to the North Vietnamese reaction to such an announcement? The chortles of unholy glee issuing from Hanoi would be audible in every capital of the world.

Is this evidence of our zeal and courage to stay the course? Of

course not! It would be interpreted to be exactly what it is. A resigned and discouraged effort to find a way out of a conflict for which we had lost our will and dedication.

And what of our bargaining position? It would have been utterly destroyed. Hanoi would be secure in the comforting thought that we had informed the world that we would refrain from practically all activities that would be damaging to North Vietnam.

It would be tantamount to turning over our hole card and showing Hanoi that it was a deuce.

Can one recall that we ever successfully terminated a war by such a program? In World War I, World War II and the Korean War, the pressure was constantly increased until the enemy found it intolerable and capitulated.

The President and every man around him wants to end the war. But the future of our children and grandchildren require that it be ended by accomplishing our purpose, i.e., the thwarting of the aggression by North Vietnam, aided by China and Russia.

Free peoples everywhere, and Communists everywhere, in fact the entire world, is watching to see if the United States meant what it said when it announced its intention to help defend South Vietnam.

It will affect the plans and intentions and aspirations of many people.

Because of the unique position we occupy in the world of today,

we cannot expect other countries and other peoples to love us, but with courage and determination, and the help of God, we can make them respect us.

It is clear to me that the course of action offered in the memorandum does not accomplish this purpose.