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Friday, Nov. 3, 1967

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MR. PRESIDENT:

Herewith General Taylor's arguments  
in response to those I gave him from the  
unidentified paper.

He will be filing a paper of his own in a  
few days.

*Pres file*

W. W. R.

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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November 3, 1967

Mr. President:

Walt Rostow has asked my comments on the following possible course of action:

Proposal

The U.S. will stabilize its military strength in Vietnam at presently approved levels and, with its allies, will continue to conduct the war in South Vietnam essentially as at present, making every effort to hold down U.S. casualties and battle damage and to pass the burden of the fighting to the South Vietnamese.

There will be no extension of the air target system in North Vietnam beyond the present one and no blockade or mining of the ports. At some point, we will stop the bombing of North Vietnam except for the use of air strikes in the Demilitarized Zone to suppress shelling or to interdict enemy troop movements.

The purpose of the foregoing course of action would be to allay apprehensions at home and abroad of a further expansion of the conflict and to increase the pressure on Hanoi to reduce its military activities or to enter upon negotiations. It is my understanding that all or most of our intentions under this alternative would be announced publicly.

Comment

Of the alternatives\* open to the U.S., this is one form of the Pull-back Alternative. While this course of action might tend to allay the fears of those who are concerned over an expansion of the conflict, it would provide fresh ammunition for the numerically larger number of critics who say that we are embarked on an endless and hopeless struggle or that we are really not trying to win. The decrease in our efforts implicit in this proposal would tend to nullify by a form of self-stagnation the progress which we properly contend that we are now making and would give renewed stimulus to our impatient fellow citizens who are even now crying for a quick solution or get out. Like other variations of the Pull-back Alternative, it would probably degenerate into an eventual pull-out.

\* There are four in all: Pull-out, Pull-back, All-out, Stick-it-out

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The curtailment of the bombing under this proposal has all the liabilities which we have noted in previous discussions of this issue. The South Vietnamese would be deeply discouraged by this lifting of the penalty which the bombing imposes on the North. I would suspect that our other allies contributing troops would object strongly to this course of action - they are convinced of the essentiality of the bombing. Our own forces would regard this action as a deliberate decrease in the protection which, they feel, is afforded them by the bombing. The large majority of our citizens who believe in the bombing but who thus far have been silent could be expected to raise violent objections on the home front, probably surpassing in volume the present criticisms of the anti-bombers.

Probably the most serious objection of all to this Pull-back Alternative would be the effect upon the enemy. Any such retreat will be interpreted as weakness and will add to the difficulty of getting any kind of eventual solution compatible with our overall objective of an independent South Vietnam free from the threat of subversive aggression.

I would recommend strongly against adopting any such course of action.

*M.D.T.*  
M. D. T.

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