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Tuesday, November 21, 1967
3:50 p.m.

Mr. President:

Late on Monday, November 20, 1967, I had an hour's session alone with Amb. Bunker. I took him through exactly the same questions I took Westy, derived from Bob McNamara's memorandum. The results were as follows.

1. A bombing stand down in North Viet Nam except in the tactical area across the DMZ if they continue to press at the DMZ. Ellsworth talked speculatively about the problem around these three points:

-- He sees no reason to believe that a bombing stand down now would lead to serious negotiations, and he does not think we should trade bombing simply for talk;

-- He is, however, interested in the barrier and in SOUTHPAW (harassment on the ground in Laos) because he would like to put us in a position where we might put Hanoi to a test in the future with a bombing pause. Therefore, he feels it important that we get as good a grasp as we can on infiltration of Laos so that the costs of a pause designed to test Hanoi would be minimized.

2. Announce that our present U. S. troop ceilings are the limit of our commitment. Bunker is rather drawn to this proposition if we make it clear that an announced troop ceiling would assume that no one else would expand the war. He says that we are fighting a limited war for limited objectives and believes that we will not need more than 525,000 U. S. forces. He was not dogmatic on this point but, I would say, mildly favorable.

3. Forego ground operations in North Vietnam; Laos; and Cambodia. Bunker would make no statement committing us against such ground operations. His advice: keep them guessing. As for Laos, as indicated above, he actively supports SOUTHPAW.

4. No mining of Haiphong. Bunker is against mining the harbors. We are doing almost as well by hitting transport around Haiphong. The international complications are worth avoiding.

5. No attack on dikes. Bunker is against the attack on dikes because of the international political repercussions.

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6. Maintain progress with lesser U. S. casualties and destruction inside South Vietnam. Under this heading Bunker is worried about future operations in the Delta. He is afraid that an additional massive flow of refugees could turn the people of South Vietnam against us. He is skeptical of Komer's view that the refugees are churned up by enemy operations. He believes they are mainly trying to get away from our bombing. It is true that ~~of~~ 2 million refugees generated by the war, 638,000 have already gone back to their villages and another 600,000 have been resettled elsewhere. But he would like to see the total refugee number decline in 1968 and not increase. (I told Bunker that I had raised this question with the President and with Westy, so you would get a feel for it. I urged him to set down with Westy and make sure that the actual tactical plan Westy proposes to follow in the Delta would not generate excessive refugees, pointing out that Westy himself seemed sensitive on this point as well as on the need not to induce a decline in Delta rice production by his military operations.

7. Transfer functions to the ARVN. Bunker, is, of course, all for this; but he says we must go slow and steady. We should not shove at them more than they can absorb at any one time. Like Westy, he regards the build up of the political and military capacity of the South Vietnamese as a central task.

Coming back to Bob McNamara's two basic propositions -- about a new announced policy of stabilization and a bombing halt -- Bunker said in general we should refuse to put the war in a time frame. He has carefully separated his own language in this matter from Westy's. In any policy announcement it would be good to indicate that we expect the GVN to take over increasing military and nation building responsibility, but we must avoid giving them the feeling that we are pulling out and leaving them alone, or that we are relaxing in our effort to bring the war to a conclusion as rapidly as possible. In general, we must keep flexible and try to conduct the war with maximum imagination within accepted limits. Bunker's position on bombing is set out in paragraph 1, above.

W. W. Rostow

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