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Authority 7109 85-316By rg/wj, NARA, Date 12-4-91

Monday, November 20, 1967

Pres file

Mr. President:

I could not get Westmoreland and Bunker together because of Bunker's schedule today, but I had a good lunch in my office with Westy and put to him the key propositions in Bob McNamara's memorandum.

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. He was against such a policy. Effective bombing operations against the logistical system requires pressure throughout that system, from the Chinese Communist border all the way south. He wants to keep the northeast railway lines cut or harassed; he wants to continue complicated shipments out of Halpheng to Hanoi and south. He wants to keep destroying the temporary bridges which they put in.

When I pressed him on the question of Hanoi-Halpung area, he said: bombing south of the 20th parallel is "absolutely essential." He would prefer to see bombing continued all the way to the Chinese Communist border.

2. Announce that our present U. S. troop ceilings are the limit of our commitment. He said that in one sense the issue is academic because they will not all be there for a year; although he is satisfied that the present troop shipment schedule is as tight as it can be. On television he said he would pass judgment on the adequacy of the troop level at the time when the 525,000 are in place. He believes it would be "foolish" to announce now that 525,000 is our limit, although obviously we hope that it will prove to be the maximum requirement.

3. Foreign ground operations in North Vietnam; Laos; and Cambodia. With respect to North Vietnam, he would like for us to have the capability to raid North Vietnam in force above the DMZ in May-June of next year -- the earliest time that might be technically possible. He is not now recommending such an operation; but he thinks it important that we have such an option if our DMZ position requires it at that time.

With respect to Laos, he has been discussing with Bob McNamara some very limited operations by South Vietnamese forces, which would get at certain critical base areas now being used in Laos to support operations against us in the highlands. In addition, there is an area in southeast Laos which is used as a rocket storage base which he would like to get at come next March, again with South Vietnamese troops. These would be raid operations designed to make the enemy uncertain of his sanctuary. Therefore, although a formal recommendation

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has not yet come to us from him, he would not like us flatly to rule out the possibility of some limited raiding operations in Laos.

With respect to Cambodia, he is sensitive, of course, to the political problem. He believes there are "dozens even hundreds" of VC bases of the kind just discovered by the press inside Cambodia. Again, he is not now recommending any Cambodian operations but he does not wish to see them flatly ruled out.

4. No mining of Haiphong. He thinks we ought to make a maximum effort to throttle the flow of supplies from Haiphong into the country, but believes our present efforts to harass and isolate Haiphong are quite effective; and he understands well that they involve less risk than mining or attacking Soviet ships. Therefore, he is not recommending an attack on Haiphong harbor.

5. No attack on dikes. He is not at all sure the Air Force has a realistic capability for destroying the dikes; and the effort to destroy them would raise tremendous political problems. He does not recommend, therefore, an attack on the dikes.

6. Maintain progress with lesser U. S. casualties and destruction inside South Vietnam. Westy's reply to this point was, simply, that is his "constant endeavor." Every operation is undertaken with a view to minimizing our own and South Vietnamese civil casualties. On the other hand, he cannot permit his tactical operations to be controlled by these criteria. In this context, he noted that certain technical devices now coming into use would tend to make our bombing attacks in South Vietnam more accurate and otherwise help to limit casualties.

7. Transfer functions to the ARVN. Over the next two years this is Westy's central purpose. Elements in a program have been studied; but a mature operational program to transfer functions does not yet exist. One reason for his statements in the U. S. about the ARVN and the U. S. phase down within two years is to give him leverage, when he goes back, to both elevate the South Vietnamese -- by recalling the confidence he showed in them in the U. S. -- and to pressure them in the direction of better performance and more responsibility. He is extremely conscious that one of our tasks is not merely to achieve our immediate purpose in Vietnam but to leave behind a military establishment capable of looking after itself increasingly.

With respect to Bob McNamara's two central propositions, then:

-- Westy is against a new announced program of stabilization, although he does not now envisage more U. S. troops and actively wishes to

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see the ARVN take over more functions;

-- He is flatly against a bombing stand down for reasons set out in paragraph 1, above.

W. W. Rostow

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