

P file

Nov. 17, 1967

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Possible key questions for 11:00 a.m.

1. Q. General Westmoreland said we could begin to bring troops home in two years. Do you agree?

A. What Ambassador Bunker, General Westmoreland, and Ambassador Komer told me was:

-- We are making progress on all fronts;

-- The Vietnamese have the desire and the capacity to carry an increasing part of the burden of defending their country and building a nation;

-- And, in General Westmoreland's view, within two years we might see some of our forces withdrawn from Viet Nam.

He is the man best equipped to make such an estimate. I was interested in it; and I am sure the American people are interested in it.

2. Q. If we are making such progress, why are more U. S. troops needed in Viet Nam?

A. U. S. forces are needed to help hold the North Vietnamese thrusts across the DMZ and near the Cambodian frontier. They are also needed to deal with the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces in the provinces so that the South Vietnamese can carry forward more rapidly their Revolutionary Development program.

In short,

Our additional forces, plus those of South Vietnam, Australia, Thailand, and the other fighting allies, will help shorten the war.

3. Q. Reports today are that there has been a heavy movement against the pound in financial centers. Do you have any comment?

A. I have nothing to add to Secretary Fowler's statement of yesterday.

4. Q. There are reports that we bombed diplomatic installations in Hanoi last night. Did we?

A. Our two targets near Hanoi last night were 2-1/2 and 3 miles away from the area of reported damage. We know there was very heavy anti-aircraft and surface-to-air missile fire against our planes. Beyond that I have no information or comment at this time.

Mr. Rostow said he has a better reply than ( COPY LBJ LIBRARY

5. Q. Senator Robert Kennedy has said we passed up important opportunities to negotiate peace in Viet Nam last winter. What is your comment?

A. The information available to the President is inevitably greater than that available to a Senator. I can assure you that at no time have responsible officials in Hanoi offered to this government any formula for negotiation in private or in public other than that contained in Ho Chi Minh's letter to me of February 15.

The reasons why that formula is unacceptable are, I am sure, quite apparent.

6. Q. What is the purpose of the consultations with Ambassador Bunker, General Westmoreland, and Ambassador Komar?

A. (see attached memorandum)

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INFORMATION

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Thursday, November 16, 1967 -- 8:00 p.m.

Mr. President:

I have been asked to summarize for your press conference tomorrow your meetings with the Saigon team. I would make the following points.

1. This is a routine meeting to take stock after 6 months' experience by the new team in Saigon and after the formation of the newly elected Vietnamese government.

2. There are no new great decisions before us because our policy in Vietnam is firmly established; and we are making progress in military, political, and economic terms.

3. We are examining how we can accelerate forward movement within an agreed strategy in the light of the priorities set by the South Vietnamese government and in the light of our own military operations.

4. We are heartened by the steps already taken by the new South Vietnamese government with respect to:

- corruption;
- the new responsibilities passed to elected local governments with respect to the collection and use of land taxes;
- the enlargement by 65,000 of the armed forces of South Vietnam;
- the program to assist the regional and popular forces;
- and in other fields.

We know the new government plans to take further steps in these and other areas and we want to be sure we can be of maximum assistance to it.

5. I have had long sessions individually with Amb. Bunker, Gen. Westmoreland and Amb. Komer. They each bring to me a story of solid progress in the right directions. They are each confident in our basic strategy. That strategy has our support here in Washington. We are simply discussing ways of moving forward more effectively within that strategy.