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Pres file

Thursday, November 16, 1967
9:50 a.m.

Mr. President:

It would mean a good deal to Bill Leonhart if you would have him in for a part, at least, of your talk with Robert Komer today at 1:30 p.m. 4:45

Leonhart has been doing his job well under difficult circumstances; and, as you can see from the attached, has some thoughtful ideas on the issues that we ought to get settled while Bunker, Westy, and Komer are in town.

W. W. Rostow

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NLJ 86-166

By *isp*, NARA, Date *1-26-88*

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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November 15, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR WALT ROSTOW

SUBJECT: This Week's Vietnam Discussions

As seen from this office, there are four major problems we should try to put in more manageable form during the week:

A. Military Construction and Civil/Military Priorities.

1. We do not have the full picture. But we know a serious shortage of money may exist and limit what we can do over the next six months.

2. As we understand it, DOD's original budget requests were \$55 million in the regular bill and \$200 million in a contingency construction fund. Initial Congress action cut the latter to \$50 million for a total of \$105 million. Meanwhile, endorsed Vietnam construction requirements rose to \$300 million.

3. We understand the House has restored an additional \$50 million in contingency. But if the Senate agreed, this would provide only \$155 million against \$300 million-plus of priority needs. (DOD has a \$400 million carry-over from previously appropriated construction funds--which it wishes to preserve to cover rapid alterations in the military environment--e.g. moves of airfields, troop bases areas, etc. This carry-over has been one reason for Congressional cuts in the new requests.)

4. Approved Program Five construction projects--contingent on the level of funding--include US troop cantonments, LOC improvements, civilian hospitals, RF/PF housing, ARVN dependent housing. Some of the CORDS or CORDS-related projects, such as additional Chieu Hoi or refugee facilities--and specifically detention centers--have such low priority that as matters now stand, they are unlikely to be completed in 1968.

5. Additionally, MACV's existing military construction effort is reportedly fully tasked for the next 19 months. The present budget estimates do not allow for the higher costs of retaining civilian contractor firms to replace over-programmed military construction units.

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6. Action: What we need is a hard core list of construction requirements--which can be funded and completed in the next six months--to match our top operational priorities. Only DOD can produce this--but the determination of priority construction criteria should be discussed with Bunker, Westmoreland, and Komer.

If we are right to put our main emphases on ARVN improvement, anti-infrastructure, and LOCs--then civil/military construction priorities should relate. Highest priorities should continue for US troop essentials and civilian hospitals (to which we are committed to the Congress). But we need a listing of RVNAF needs, detention centers, and LOCs scaled to various levels of fund availabilities.

B. Delta Operation Plans and Civil Relations.

1. We do not know with precision Westmoreland's campaign plans for the Northern Delta (III Corps) or his intentions to schedule military operations in 1968 in the lower Delta (IV Corps). There are important military--and anti-infrastructure--advantages involved.

2. The Delta has symbolic as well as intrinsic importance--both in terms of Vietnamese population and US public opinion. Application of excessive military force or indiscriminate use of fire power in these populated areas by units not previously employed there could produce an adverse impact on the pacification program in general, particularly if these operations were accompanied by increased use of defoliants and herbicides aimed at exposing VC base areas and clearing military lines of communication to prevent VC ambush. Integration of military plans with refugee and Chieu Hoi programs is essential.

3. Action: Westmoreland should be asked to outline his Delta plans to the President. And ground rules of engagement in the Delta should be discussed with Bunker and Komer--particularly for air and artillery cover, and defoliant and herbicide use. To maximize the effect of successful military operations on US opinion--and to minimize adverse criticism, we should ensure that combat plans have taken into account:

-- adequacy or expansion of facilities for civilian casualties

-- additional facilities for refugee care and housing

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-- a GVN system of indemnities for damages to private property

-- impact on rice production and transport to deficit areas (Saigon).

C. The Next Summit and the Image of the War.

1. Assuming a Summit Meeting next spring, its results will have much to do with shaping the US image of the war through the summer and fall.

2. We should seek to use it to emphasize the constructive, nation-building elements of our Vietnam policy--to get the stress off blood and bombs and killing. To do this we need new initiatives. We should start planning them now.

3. I think the theme should be the reconstruction of village life. And its centerpiece, in my view, should be the announcement of a joint quasi-autonomous US-GVN rural institution, patterned after the highly successful US-China Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction (JCRR).

4. State-AID-and this office have strongly endorsed the project to Bunker, who has undertaken to discuss it with Thieu at an opportune time. We think a number of senior GVN officials favor it. I believe it should be pressed.

5. The Joint Board would be administered by five prestigious members--two from each country, plus a GVN chairman--all presidential appointees. AID is prepared to subscribe \$25 million (half in counterpart) as initial working capital for a multi-year period. It would not take over the functions of any GVN ministry but would fill needs of rural financing and technical assistance not now available in Vietnam.

6. Around the Board, we could wrap projects to: (a) spur action on land reform (by providing funds directly to villages to help finance local land purchases and redistribution) - (b) stimulate rural productivity - (c) strengthen non-government groups (such as co-ops, trade unions, farmers associations).

7. This emphasis on village reconstruction relates closely to many of our existing programs--universal elementary education, rice and pig productivity, community development and new life. We could use the Joint Board to stress the US-GVN commitment to support local self-government--building on local elections, the recent revolutionary decision

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to permit villages to levy and keep local taxes, and the proposed transfer of land reform administration to village councils. And it could be launched dramatically by a joint public announcement at highest levels in Washington and Saigon at the time of naming its presidential appointees.

8. But if we're to orchestrate these prospects for next spring--and use them in the following months--we should firm up the design now.

D. Washington Backstopping

1. The week's discussions should review the adequacy of present backstopping arrangements for the civil/military interface of CORDS operations in the field.

2. Contingency studies are now underway among the agencies concerned examining whether new budget and Congressional accountability arrangements should be recommended for the pacification program. Alternative suggestions include a defined CORDS appropriation to DOD or to the White House.

3. The President may wish the views of Bunker, Westy, and Bob Komer. We've been monitoring the inter-agency talks. Thus far I'm not persuaded the changes proposed would be advantageous to the President.

Bill
William Leonhart

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