

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Monday, January 15, 1968
5:45 p. m.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Misgivings about Vietnam felt by VIP group

In early December a meeting of a distinguished group of 22 American citizens was called by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The purpose was to discuss our Vietnam policy. The meeting was chaired by the President of the Carnegie Endowment, Joe Johnson, and included Harding Bancroft of the New York Times, and John Cowies, Hedley Donovan, Richard Neustadt, Gen. Matthew Ridgway, Roger Hilsman, etc. (A list of those attending is attached.)

As a follow-through to the meeting, three members of the group, Joe Johnson, Charles Yost, and Ernest Gross, called on Secretary Rusk and had a lengthy meeting with two members of my staff. The purpose of these meetings was to pave the way for presentation of the group's conclusions to you.

Joe Johnson has written to you transmitting a memorandum setting forth the "substantial consensus" of the group's views on Vietnam. He asks to see you to make a personal report and answer any questions you may have.

In brief, the group felt that Hanoi is not likely to agree to negotiations in the near future, and that a "precipitant or dishonorable" US withdrawal "would be disastrous." The group felt that the United States should avoid any ground probes into Laos or Cambodia but should work to strengthen ICC activities along the Cambodian frontier. The group also felt that any widening of the war would alienate friendly world opinion and endanger domestic support for the US effort in Vietnam.

Specifically, the group made four recommendations:

1. In the South we should make every effort to reduce the level of military conflict. Our emphasis should be on "clear-and-hold" operations, rather than "search-and-destroy" efforts.
2. We should stop the bombing of North Vietnam. This should not be contingent upon any comparable action by the enemy, nor should we expect that it would lead to early negotiations.
3. We should press the South Vietnamese Government to assume greater responsibility for both the defense and pacification of the country and should make continued aid to South Vietnam contingent upon progress.

4. We should accept the National Liberation Front as an organized factor in the political life of South Vietnam and should recognize that the risk of trying to deal with the National Liberation Front politically is less than the attempt to destroy it or exclude it by force.

In sum, the group believes that we should moderate the level of hostilities without regard to the prospects for negotiations. They believe that such a posture on our part reduces the risk of a broader war and makes it easier to maintain domestic support for an indefinite US involvement in Vietnam. You are familiar with this pattern of thought.

You should also know:

-- I had a long telephone conversation with Joe Johnson. It turned out that a good deal of the mood of the group was generated by fear that we were about to go pouring into Cambodia and Laos. When I explained the dangers involved in a bombing halt, he said that it would be good if I talked to the group about this matter. (In fact, I am sure their views on bombing have been generated by Adam Yarmolinsky, George Kistiakowsky, and Roger Hilsman.)

-- Joe Johnson called me today to say that Joe Kraft has hold of a copy of their memo.

Their great objective, of course, is to see you. Although there are some quite important people in the group (Bancroft, Cowles, Donovan, Ridgway), I recommend against your meeting with them. Secretary Rusk takes the same view. He is willing to see them again; and I have already indicated that, subject to finding an appropriate time, I would see them.

W. W. Rostow

President will see them _____

Sec. Rusk will see them _____

W. W. Rostow will see them _____

No one _____

See me _____

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

Panel Discussion on Vietnam
1-3 December 1967

List of Participants

Harding F. Bancroft
The New York Times

Lincoln Bloomfield
Center for International Studies, M.I.T.

Charles G. Bolte
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

John Cowles
The Minneapolis Star and Tribune

Hedley Donovan
Time, Inc.

Daniel Ellsberg
The RAND Corporation

Miss Frances FitzGerald
author of recent articles on Vietnam in Atlantic

Ernest A. Gross
Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt and Mosle

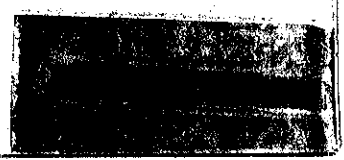
Roger Hilsman
School of International Affairs, Columbia University

Joseph E. Johnson
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Milton Katz
Harvard Law School

George Kistiakowsky
Department of Chemistry, Harvard University

Franklin A. Lindsay
Itek Corporation



Richard Neustadt
John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Ithiel de Sola Pool
Center for International Studies, M.I.T.

Matthew B. Ridgway
General, U.S. Army, retired

Marshall D. Shulman
Russian Institute, Columbia University

Donald B. Straus
American Arbitration Association

Kenneth W. Thompson
The Rockefeller Foundation

James C. Thomson
Department of History, Harvard University

Stephen J. Wright
United Negro College Fund

Adam Yarmolinsky
Harvard Law School

Charles Yost
Council on Foreign Relations

Kenneth Young
Asia Society

Staff:

Mrs. Martha Sue Tharp
Robert C. Richter
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

21 December 1967

Mr. President:


The attached brief memorandum on Vietnam reflects the substantial consensus of a group of private United States citizens who met recently at my invitation to look at the implications of the present situation in Vietnam and to consider possible future courses of action. This two-day meeting was convened by me as president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, with the approval of the Endowment's Trustees. The Endowment's basic mandate is, in the words of Andrew Carnegie, "to hasten the abolition of international war."

I submit this memorandum as a private citizen who has been continuously concerned on a professional basis since before World War II with the role of the United States in world affairs, and particularly with its role as a leader in the search for a just and lasting peace. As a citizen and as an historian, I am also deeply concerned that the quality of American life reflect our highest national values.

On Monday, 18 December, I met by appointment with Secretary Rusk; I was accompanied by two other members of the group, Messrs. Ernest A. Gross and Charles W. Yost. After we had explained to him the origin of the meeting and handed him a copy of the attached list of the participants, we had a frank and illuminating discussion with him about the memorandum. The Secretary thought it would be helpful if I clarified in writing certain of the premises on which the document is based, premises that had been omitted from the memorandum in the interest of brevity.

First, there was a clear recognition by those present at the meeting that Hanoi continues to be unyielding in its objectives and shows no willingness to change its policies. The group recognized that this meant that there is little or no likelihood that a United States strategy along the lines urged

President Lyndon B. Johnson
The White House
Washington, D.C.



in the memorandum would lead to effective negotiations in the near future. The feeling was strong that the strategy proposed would be conducive to the advancement of United States interests, whatever Hanoi's stand might be; this is the significance of the sentence: "United States policy should not be dependent on Hanoi's decisions."

Second, there was virtually unanimous support among those present for the view that the United States must accept a long-term involvement in South Vietnam, and that precipitate or dishonorable withdrawal would be disastrous. This, in fact, underlies and is embodied in the proposals made in the attached memorandum.

Third, with respect to the recommendation that the United States should not engage in ground probes into Laos and Cambodia, Messrs. Gross, Yost and I--and I believe most of the other participants--would support pressures upon all parties to the Laos Declaration and Protocol of 1962 to fulfill their contractual obligations under that agreement, and also endorse efforts to strengthen the International Control Commission along the Cambodian frontier.

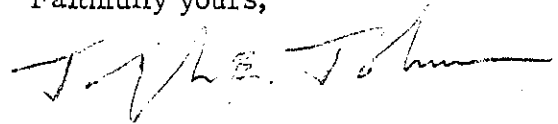
Although the group did not have an opportunity to consider thoroughly and reach a conclusion about the possible role of the United Nations, I and other participants in the meeting, including notably Mr. Gross, believe that, should the United States cease strategic bombing of North Vietnam, the United States can engage the responsibilities of the Members of the United Nations and enlist their support in bringing about a satisfactory end to the strife in Vietnam. A suggestion as to how this might be accomplished was spelled out orally to Mr. Rusk.

Following our meeting with Secretary Rusk, Messrs. Gross, Yost and I had an appointment with Mr. Walt W. Rostow. Finding at the last minute, however, that he would be unable to see us, he asked Messrs. Leonhart and Wright of his staff to receive us, and we gave them a full account of the meeting and of our talk with Mr. Rusk.

This letter and the enclosed memorandum are offered in a spirit of appreciation for your untiring efforts toward peace, and of the consciousness of my responsibility to try, as you expressed it in your recent speech in Miami, "to be constructive in word and constructive in deed." I should welcome an opportunity, both for myself and on

behalf of the deeply concerned group of citizens who attended our meeting, to report personally to you on the meeting and answer questions you may have.

Faithfully yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "J. E. Johnson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joseph E. Johnson

cc: The Honorable Dean Rusk

