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INFORMATION

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Wednesday, March 27, 1968
6:00 p.m.

Mr. President:

Amb. Bunker had this memo of
Ed Lansdale's distributed to the Mission
Council.

It is much in the spirit of your
speech draft.

It is good.

W. W. Rostow

cc: Mr. Harry McPherson

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WWRostow:rlh

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4(b)
White House Guidelines, Feb. 24, 1983
By sg, NARA, Date 4-9-82

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TO: Members, U.S. Mission Council

FROM: Ed Lansdale *Ed*

SUBJECT: Viet-Nam 1968

DATE: March 21, 1968

With the concurrence of Ambassador Bunker, this memorandum is brought to your attention.

1.

We have had evidence in past weeks that this is a year of intensity, of magnified events and of magnified consequences, here, at home in the United States, everywhere that people feel touched by what happens in Viet-Nam. Each of us, also, has our own view of just how critical a year 1968 might prove to be. Thus, with the premonition that we are close to one of those strange "change points" in history, and yearning to have that change favor our cause, I have done some thinking about the struggle ahead. I share the results with you, in what follows.

2.

I believe there is only one acceptable course of action for Americans to follow in Viet-Nam. Stated simply, it is:

Help the Vietnamese get a clear concept of their own national goal which if achieved will gain them a viable nation, and then help them be strong enough to win this goal themselves. (Course A.)

The other principal alternatives, as noted below, I do not believe are acceptable:

B. Take over the management of Vietnamese affairs ourselves and get the war won, with the thought of handing over a going concern to the Vietnamese afterwards.

Or,

C. Find some graceful, rational way of disengaging ourselves from the war in Viet-Nam at the earliest possible moment, without winning.

We are in trouble in Viet-Nam today because we have never fully understood or followed course A and because, therefore, we are attempting

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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6

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By lig, NARA Date 8-26-96



to a considerable degree to follow all of the above courses of action simultaneously. This is an imperfect strategy with which to meet an enemy who is so skillful at waging political-military war against us. The U. S. Mission, for example, currently is performing actions that fall withⁱⁿ both courses A and B. Course C, which is disastrously counterproductive to the other courses especially when it is pursued openly at a critical moment in the war, is being publicly advocated in the U. S., including, in Vietnamese eyes, in some official quarters.

I believe we can and should focus our efforts far more sharply on course A and also join together and speak with one voice through a Mission statement to which all can subscribe, to tell official Washington where we stand concerning course C. The statement need not imply criticism of any past U. S. moves or opinions. It can express the views of the Americans directly involved in the conflict on what the truth looks like to us, from up close.

To turn these thoughts into positive actions, the following steps are recommended:

1) The U. S. Mission should define in precise terms the goal in Viet-Nam which if achieved will give the Vietnamese a viable nation, and therefore the goal towards which all elements of the U. S. Mission must strive. A small task force representing each of us, directed by one of us, can draft such a definition for our approval, in one or two weeks. By defining our goal I mean something along the following line:

"We believe the South Vietnamese people have certain inalienable rights including freedom of the individual, justice for all citizens and the right to choose their own form of government without being forced to accept a dictatorial system imposed through terror and invasion. These principles, which we and the Vietnamese share, have achieved concrete, pragmatic expression in the Vietnamese Constitution of 1967. We support the Constitution and the process of Constitutional Government in Viet-Nam. This includes supporting concepts that the duty of each Government official is to serve the legitimate interests of the people; the duty of the Armed Forces is to defend the Constitution, and to protect the people; etc."

2) This statement of our national objective in Viet-Nam could then be used in the following ways:

a. Sent to Washington where, with the President's approval, it could be disseminated within the executive and legislative branches, and to the American public,



with appropriate wording for each of these audiences.

b. Disseminated to Vietnamese leaders.

c. Disseminated, with appropriate classified guidance, to the U. S. advisory structure in South Viet-Nam.

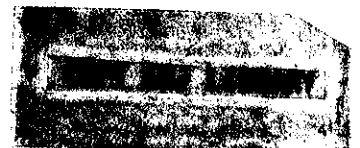
The above actions would not involve a sudden, mid-stream change in our policies and programs in Viet-Nam but rather would hopefully zero in all of our efforts toward achievement of a clear national objective while making this objective clear to the Vietnamese, the American people, and the world. This would be of great value, regardless of the enemy situation, including the real possibility that the enemy is close to being on the verge of defeat.

3.

If we are to succeed with course A, we must be practical realists and employ our best means to make our Vietnamese allies strong, effective, victorious, and keep sticking to these best means. Our behavior toward the Vietnamese should be that of brothers, even stern older brothers at times, but never that of uninformed and insensitive rich relatives.

In the past, we often have failed to use the best "leverage" of all on our Vietnamese allies -- their need to do things right instead of wrong for their own benefit, to save their own country, to assure their own futures (i. e., national self-interest). This is the same motive which has brought Americans to this land, which has caused us to pay so dearly in lives, goods and money for the effort here. Vietnamese are as human as we are. They will act from the same motive, when it is put to them in believable terms. We must break through such barriers as Vietnamese (and American) colonial tendencies and xenophobia to get the basic truth of what we all hope to achieve in Viet-Nam out into plain view in terms the Vietnamese understand, and then work to get this goal accepted in practice due to the consistency of our behavior at all levels.

The sound start in motivating our Vietnamese allies, then, is to expose them fully to a specific statement of our aims, the definition of just what is desired for a future Viet-Nam, and to cinch this by showing them we believe this, too. Our goal and theirs are practically



identical, only they are not sure of this now and their understanding of actions required to attain this goal is too hazy.

We must convince them of the integrity of our intentions and help them see the path to success more clearly. Then, our guidance, our help, must be given only on the basis of assisting the Vietnamese towards this goal. Remaining true to this rule, we will be believed. Advice to Vietnamese X will not have him wonder if this will cause him trouble with Vietnamese Z and Y, since advice to the latter will follow the same rule as advice to the former. Upon this sound basis, we can then give effective guidance for coping with corrupt practices among Vietnamese officials, ineffective leadership, and other vexing problems. We help those who strive to reach the known and desired goal. We stop helping those who don't strive. Our Vietnamese allies will catch on fast. The deserving will get strong; the undeserving will get eliminated.

Therefore, as noted above, it is recommended that the U. S. Mission, when it defines our specific goal, publish this in a form for use by the entire U. S. advisory effort, and to show to our Vietnamese allies, to provide a constant basic reminder of what every official action should be aimed towards achieving. All Americans in contact with Vietnamese should be instructed to give official advice based upon whether actions are good because they are towards this goal or are bad because they are not. If each American advisor, during the years we have been here, had made his Vietnamese opposite number a better man in serving his country, instead of limiting advice to technical matters, we would have a far mightier force of Vietnamese allies today. Let us concentrate more on this now.

4.

This paper has noted that we are in a most critical period of the war in Viet-Nam and has recommended some fundamental actions at this time within the U. S. Mission. These actions could revitalize the basis upon which U. S. organizations tackle the problems confronting us in Viet-Nam, as well as make our cause in Viet-Nam far more credible to the Vietnamese, the U. S. public and the world. Let us get set to win!

