



PERSONAL MEMORANDUM

23 February 1966

TO: Bill Connell

FROM: Rufus Phillips

SUBJECT: Some thoughts on Speaking to the American People
About Vietnam

1. While you and the Vice President have been away, I've been following the Vietnam debate here avidly. Without being presumptuous, I would like to offer some thoughts about what might be said about Vietnam at this point
2. It seems to me that in talking about Vietnam, you have two main target groups: The intellectuals and the American people at large. I don't believe that the Administration will be able to hold the American people for very long unless a substantial part of the intellectuals can be won over to Administration policy.
3. To win the intellectuals, (in this group I include students and religious leaders), as well as the general public, the meaning of the Honolulu Declaration should be made clearer; that it establishes a common political base and moral purpose with the Vietnamese for the war. Attached is a newsclipping of a recent sermon by Dr. Howlett which is encouraging because it picks up this essential point.
4. It seems to me that we must stop equivocating about negotiations with the Viet Cong (National Liberation Front). In the first place, it is a derogation of Vietnamese sovereignty and makes our whole purpose there ring hollow. Secondly, there are very cogent historical, moral and practical grounds against it which ought to be conclusively set forth. So long as we keep the door open for negotiations with the Viet Cong, we are weakening our own moral position. And we are so weakening the Vietnamese Government that they will not be able to carry out a political program which will win the Vietnamese people away from the Viet Cong and which will give the American people heart to sustain our commitment. The Vietnamese people are our constituents in this struggle as well as our fellow Americans. Specific examples and quotes from Vietnamese and other Asians during the Vice President's trip could be most effective in conveying how they see our commitment.

5. I hope that the Vice President will not feel obliged to play on American fears of the Chinese. A distinction should be drawn between the Chinese Communist regime, which is expansionist because it is Communist and has to prove the inevitability of Communism in Asia or suffer internal collapse, and the Chinese people who do not wish to rule Asia. It is wrong and will be counter-productive if our struggle in Vietnam is reduced to simplistic terms of combatting the "yellow peril".

6. I believe that there is a valid parallel between the containment of Communism now in Asia, and the containment of Communism in Europe after World War II. The difference is, of course, that it is much more difficult in Southeast Asia because of the internal political weaknesses of the countries there. There were political as well as economic weakness in Postwar Europe and some research into the debate on the Marshall Plan and the Berlin Airlift might turn up quotable statements in today's context.

7. Above all, whatever is said, a responsive chord must be struck in the heart of all Americans to help us make common cause with the Vietnamese people and to lift the debate out of the banalities of military tactics, such as do we need 300,000, 500,000 or a million men. The point which unfortunately escapes too many people, is that the number of Americans required and the number of casualties we will suffer are inversely proportional to the strength and perseverance of our moral commitment to the principles in which both the Vietnamese and the American people believe.

8. Finally, I hope the Vice President will be able to line out for the American people what kind of war this is and how you expect it to go. That the Vietnamese people, like ourselves during our revolution, must find the expression of their common cause. That they know what it is and are working toward it. That as they find it, through a combination of political attraction and force, the Viet Cong movement will dissipate. That no time-table can be set because this is not a matter of logistics, or of numbers of troops, but of the hearts and minds of men. And that we must be willing to persevere in our commitment to their freedom, because it is indivisible from our own, and because it is from this commitment that the Vietnamese draw the added strength necessary to continue the struggle, more than from our physical presence.

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