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June 25, 1964

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Comments on Senator Humphrey's memorandum
to the President on Southeast Asia

I.

"There is a clear and positive alternative to either pulling out of Southeast Asia or of launching a Korea-type, conventional war in the area."

"a. There should be a U.S. decision to stay, stabilize and help the Vietnamese build.

"b. There should be a U.S. determination and an announcement that... our goal is the creation of an independent and free Southeast Asia.

"c. The Vietnamese must be guided but they must win their own war.

"d. The two most urgent fundamental needs in Viet Nam are stabilizing the Vietnamese leadership and giving some hope to which the Vietnamese people can rally."

Comment

In all of these excerpts in Senator Humphrey's report, I see nothing new or nothing contrary to what we are already doing. Under "What Should be Done", on pp. 5-6, he sets out some political goals which sound good to U.S. ears but may not be the political goals of the Vietnamese leaders. One has to realize that our political goals -- as admirable and desirable as they may be -- are not always acceptable to another people.

II.

Some of his ideas on the military program (p. 6) are worth considering.

Comment

a. SEATO seems to be an impracticable instrument for defending Southeast Asia from communist subversive insurgency -- and a poor instrument for shutting off a social revolution, I might add. Senator Humphrey recommends a new kind of organization which would foster multilateral military action and accept volunteer groups.

I think we are already started down this road, with our effort to bring in other nations. Furthermore, if one can believe what one reads in the paper and hears on the radio, General Taylor and Alexis Johnson seem to be setting up a superembassy and a superheadquarters that could direct regionally our military-diplomatic effort, if so inclined.

b. As an adjunct to this, we might look over one more time the proposal (that the Joint Chiefs of Staff once rejected) to set up a unified command for this entire Southeast area. It has many advantages and was only rejected at the time because they felt that CINCPAC was adequately and competently supporting our effort in the Southeast Asia area. Furthermore, new headquarters take additional personnel and are expensive. But now might be the time to set up such a headquarters in the area to give added emphasis to our belief that Southeast Asia is a problem as a whole, with South Viet Nam just one of the major problems. It would be a good way of signalling our "intention to stay", which Senator Humphrey feels we have not convincingly signalled to the people of the area.

Another suggestion: We ought to invite experienced counterguerrilla forces from other nations. I believe this has been explored, but it would not hurt to ask the State Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider this one more time.

On the specific military actions, Senator Humphrey's paper indicates that there is an excessive use of heavy artillery, napalm, and aerial bombs rather than the more subtle, expert counterguerrilla type weapons. There is a good point in this: the heavy weapons kill as many friendly villagers as they do Viet Cong enemies when used so indiscriminately. On the other hand, the Viet Cong are hitting the villages and the larger towns with much

larger forces now, organized as battalions. If one intends to counter these larger forces, you either have to put two or three battalions on the ground (and not knowing where they will strike next, this calls for many units), or you have to use methods that call for quick-action weapons, which usually come from the air support.

III.

On pp. 7-8 under sec. III, "Methods", Senator Humphrey makes some significant points:

a. "Send in a seasoned team of men who have demonstrated their ability to defeat Asian insurgents."

There is an inference here that the "normal, run-of-the-mill military and civilian advisers being sent out there on a rotating basis are not properly dedicated nor sufficiently trained.

There is also an inference that this "team" must have direct access to the President of the United States and that its operations and actions should not have to operate under the chain of command from MAC-V, CINCPAC, JCS, Department of Defense, Department of State.

His criticism of our present advisers states that they must be more strongly motivated; that the way to win is to win the minds and hearts of the people; that at present they only emphasize killing the Viet Cong and "God help anything that stands in the way."

There is some confusion here, and I believe that the civic action emphasis in winning the hearts and minds of the people is a great and noble idea. However, it doesn't face the present situation where it is very difficult to win the heart and mind of a man and his family when the Viet Cong are slipping in at night murdering them. Our advisers have as their primary mission stabilizing the insurgency and protecting their own lives. I am afraid that the civic action effort will have to come later or be performed by a separate group of people.

The final proposal is that the President immediately select a team and put them in charge, and the suggestion is that Major General Edward G. Lansdale and Rufus Phillips, who worked in Viet Nam in 1954-55, be either members of the team or help select it and send it out.

Secretary McNamara knows Lansdale very well. He served on the Department of Defense staff until his retirement from the Air Force, and almost at President Kennedy's insistence he was promoted to major general. But as fine as these men are, they have a reputation for using the "lone wolf" approach rather than being men who can participate as part of a large team effort.

This is not to diminish their effectiveness, because they were very effective in their previous assignments. They are highly motivated and they have penetrating ideas, and they apply them in a most practical manner. But in any effort where you have several thousand people committed over a large geographical area, it has to be a team approach and you can't do it all by yourself. Therefore, the skilled leader is one who can motivate his whole team rather than just perform with a small group in a limited area. And I would say this is the deficiency in the Lansdale-Phillips team approach.

IV.

Final Comments

There is not too much new in this proposal. There are several ideas worth considering. I am convinced that this counterguerrilla technique and knowledge is not nearly so obscure as their proposal insinuates, and certainly not as little understood as it was three years ago, nor is the Lansdale approach any longer such an occult science. I believe that you have already picked a new "first team" for the area, and as you furnish them sufficient numbers of trained and motivated personnel, you will see this situation turned around toward accomplishment.

I think General Taylor and Ambassador Alexis Johnson will put many of the ideas that are contained in this paper into effect, and I believe you will see a better propaganda effort and a more convincing performance on the part of the Army after your new team gets on the ground.

V.

Recommendations

- a. That Senator Humphrey's memorandum and the accompanying papers be made available to General Taylor for his thinking before he departs.

b. That the President direct the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State to once more re-examine the possibility of setting up a regional command, or at least a unified command for the Southeast Asia area. There is some merit and certainly some propaganda effect to be gained by this move, and it should be considered once more.

With General Taylor and Ambassador Johnson going out there now, this would not be an appropriate time to establish it, but three or four months from now it might be a very significant step to take. And then at the same time, the Taylor-Johnson team might become a "regional embassy", in a sense, to go along with the regional military command.

c. That General Wheeler, the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, be permitted to look at this memorandum to obtain any ideas that might have been overlooked in their war effort out there.

d. I do not recommend that you inject Lansdale-Phillips into the action at this time.

TED CLIFTON