

151. Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson¹

Washington, September 23, 1965.

SUBJECT

Current and Future Strategy in Vietnam—An Exchange of Views between Washington Principals and Lodge

A recent review of the situation in Vietnam by key officials of State and Defense and myself indicated that the emerging situation there required some hard thinking on future U.S. military and political actions. We posed several questions to Lodge for comment.²

U.S. Ground Operations. In the light of our military build-up we felt that the VC may be avoiding major unit actions and reverting to a strategy of small-scale actions over a prolonged period. The problem arises as to how we use our substantial ground and air strength effectively against small-scale harassment-type action, whether we should engage in pacification as opposed to patrolling actively, and whether, indeed, we should taper off our ground force build-up.

Lodge agreed that VC may seek to avoid large-scale operations but felt that the Vietnamese must deal with small-scale actions through an effective military-political campaign. U.S. forces should undertake "thorough pacification" within their own areas. Lodge endorses Westmoreland's current strategic concept which calls for the deployment of all troops now scheduled for Vietnam. Westmoreland's concept:

1. Halt the VC offensive.
2. Destroy VC units where they can be found and pacify selected high priority areas.
3. Restore progressively the entire country to GVN control.
4. Support "rural reconstruction" with comprehensive attention to the pacification process.
5. Continue the air campaign against the DRV and infiltration routes into Laos.

Lodge and Westmoreland feel VC "lie-low" tactics will become increasingly a police-social action problem. They expect increased VC terrorism, subversion and economic warfare. Thus far, there is no evidence of significant GVN resentment of U.S. ground actions.

Use of Airpower. We noted and endorsed a recent directive by Westmoreland concerning civilian implications of U.S. air operations, but we

still felt a need for a better overall analysis and evaluation of our air operations. We suggested the possibility of sending a military-civilian survey team (similar to those of World War II) to Vietnam.

Lodge replied that Westmoreland is already looking into the problem of using our increased air capability more effectively and is opposed to a group coming out from Washington at this time.

Pacification. We asked Lodge to develop a specific plan for our joint consideration which would involve the concentration of GVN forces on pacification and the reliance on U.S. forces to handle large-scale VC actions. We suggested that he propose a system of priorities and a definition of clear objectives in the pacification program.

Lodge reports that the Mission has started to grapple with this whole problem. The Hop Tac operation (pacification of provinces bordering Saigon) is getting priority attention and Lodge is encouraging Ky to concentrate GVN efforts on pacification. Westmoreland is working up a joint U.S.-GVN campaign plan and will be prepared to brief Washington on this by the end of this month. Lodge believes this will be responsive to our desire for a definition of the respective roles for U.S. and GVN forces.

Acheson Plan. We posed the possibility to Lodge of getting the GVN to apply some of the key elements of the Acheson Plan (land reform, Chieu Hoi, etc.) and to select one or more areas for the application of the plan as a whole, including local elections.

Lodge feels that GVN is already giving attention to land reform and Chieu Hoi. He agrees with our desire to get an electoral process started and has been talking to Ky about having the provincial councils elected last May elect, in turn, representatives to a national assembly. The assembly would concentrate on working up a national constitution.

Negotiations. Lodge and we both agree that we have sufficiently stressed our willingness to negotiate and any further public emphasis, except as necessary in the UN, might be misunderstood by the Communists.

Internal Political Situation. Lodge and we agree that Ky's government seems to be settling down. We also agree on the necessity to keep a watchful eye on any potential coups and to encourage Ky to generate more positive popular support.

McG.B.

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Memos to the President, McGeorge Bundy, Vol. XV. Top Secret. There is an indication on the source text that the President saw the memorandum.

² See Documents 141 and 144.