

Ball read the Wilson letter and the President approved. He suggested that Ball add that he is restricting this information to a very few and he would hope that Wilson, etc. would do the same.

Pres also said he preferred something other than the statement "the first of the year". He suggested "for a more extended period", or "for many days". Pres said he did not want to be committed. Ball said he would fix this.

Pres said he thought someone should talk to Pearson. Ball said he could go up. Pres said he would rather Ball stay here. Pres thought MacBundy could perhaps meet Pearson in Philadelphia or go to Ottawa.

Pres said Ball should be sure to have a letter from him to the Pope for Goldberg to deliver. It should thank him for the Christmas truce and the New Year's truce so the Pope would feel we were complying. Ball said he would do this.

Pres said he was depending on Ball as his lawyer and his devil's advocate. Pres said Ball was not to let "them" talk him out of anything. Pres said Ball should stay right on it until we are sure we have bled it for all it is worth.

264. Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State¹

Saigon, December 29, 1965.

2308. For the Secretary from Lodge. Herewith some comment on ideas in your 1805.²

A. Your para 8. No one will applaud more than I your efforts to secure support from the homefront. With homefront support we cannot fail. Without, we cannot win.

B. Your para 5 statement that "assuring South Viet-Nam without major bloodshed" is obviously of capital importance in bringing about steadfast homefront support. For this reason, I urge that USG in its own mind be clear as to what it regards as a satisfactory outcome of this war since some outcomes may require more bloodshed than others.

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S. Secret; Immediate; Nodis; Pinta. The source text does not indicate a time of transmission; the telegram was received at 4:35 a.m.

² Document 255

C. Let me think aloud purely for illustrative purposes. It is obvious that if we define a satisfactory outcome as 1.) seeking out and utterly destroying the North Vietnamese military main forces and potential, or 2.) seizing the Laos panhandle and the valley of the Mekong, or 3.) as meaning a state of affairs in which elections free from any intimidation can be held in every one of the 2,658 villages in all 43 provinces, we may be taking on jobs which cannot be done without major bloodshed.

D. If, on the other hand, we define "satisfactory outcome" as the U.S. Mission tried to do it in our 1377,³ this is, hold the delta and the coastal plain, the provincial capitals and the roads, push out durably, even though slowly, within South Viet-Nam through the kind of pacification-countryside rebuilding which Lansdale is promoting and ward off the North Vietnamese aggression so as to make possible the achievement of the above, perhaps we could hold on for a long time without "major bloodshed". I realize that even this may cause bloodshed too.

E. Your para 4. There is no doubt of the intense interest which public opinion polls must hold for all of us in government, and I do not question the authenticity of the Harris Poll. It does, however, point up the need for us who are in the work of foreign relations to educate one [our?] public at least in two respects:

First, that a cease fire, unaccompanied by a verified withdrawal of forces in effect confirms the Viet Cong aggressors in all the places where they are now. It also denies the sovereignty of the Government of Viet-Nam. In a very real sense, therefore, it gives the Viet Cong the victory before negotiations have been started. In fact, had our Christmas truce offer been accepted, we might have been in an extremely critical situation for the above reason. Therefore, we should first consider educating public opinion about what constitutes an honest and a dishonest cease fire, and it was in that connection that I suggested that a television documentary be made based on Admiral Joy's book about negotiations at Panmunjom.⁴

Secondly, the public needs to be educated on the fact that Hanoi and Peking do not react like Americans, and that over-eagerness on our part is interpreted by them as a sign of weakness. Therefore the 72 per cent who favor "renewed effort for a cease fire" in the belief that it would promote the chance of peace are actually defeating their own purpose and are hardening the resolve of the enemy.

I believe that sooner or later we are going to have to make these things very clear, and, of course, I will do everything I can to help.

³ Document 176.

⁴ See footnote 4, Document 237.

situation came into being in which it was indispensable for the Viet Cong large units to be defeated before true community building, with its mixture of political and security measures, would be possible. Otherwise, the Viet Cong battalions, emerging from untouchable sanctuaries, would destroy whatever community building had painstakingly been achieved.

F. Now it looks as though we can surely overcome the Viet Cong main force units. Furthermore, it looks as though the Viet Cong knows this and has already begun to act on this knowledge, transforming themselves into small units, into individual terrorists, and into subversive political operators. General Westmoreland reports an intensification of Viet Cong "incidents" from 605 to 701 in the last week, including a sharp rise in acts of terrorism. This is the highest weekly total since September 1964. There is also a downward total in actions by large units. In fact, no major battles occurred during the week. This transformation to terrorism is emphatically not "de-escalation" as one American "expert" recently said. But it is a change, and a change which we have been anticipating.

G. It cannot be said that since we began defeating main force units the GVN have let the grass grow under their feet. When the Minister of Rural Construction (i.e. community building), Mr. Ung, was killed in a plane crash, the GVN developed a new governmental organization which I discussed in my 1190 to you of 6 Oct⁵ and which is as well thought out as one can expect. Lansdale's committee is in close and constant touch. This week they called a meeting, which I attended, of all province chiefs plus elected provincial councillors to enthuse them and give them a clear idea of what they had to do. Vietnam is indeed much further ahead militarily than it is politically for the simple reason they could not really get going politically until the Viet Cong battalions were put out of business.

H. I believe the U.S. Mission is doing everything that it can to help prepare this country for a political struggle. But I am eager for new ideas and would very much appreciate any ideas or guidance which Washington can give me so that if a major political offensive were to be undertaken by the Viet Cong, we could gain time until we could score a real political victory. When we win such a victory, we can feel that we have accomplished something durable and truly worthy of our sacrifice.

2. Coup rumors

A. It is disagreeable to have to report a few coup rumors, the first which have occurred since my arrival. Although they do not look serious today, they are a preoccupation to me, and I am putting out the word in every way available that we do not want a coup, that this is the time to

subordinate petty individualistic jealousies and ambitions, and also, that it behooves those who are in government to try to act like real political leaders, by reasoning with the people who are disaffected, by involving them in the new projects, and by arranging matters so that others get some of the credit. This is not normal procedure for Orientals, particularly those who have had a long dose of the egoism of French politicos, but we are trying it.

B. I am also planning to visit the III Corps headquarters which I have not yet visited, to have some frank and, I hope, helpful talks with Generals who, although theoretically military, are actually the heads of civil and political activity and a serious potential threat.

3. Economic

A. The general price trend for the grade of rice used by the working classes continued slow increase as for more than a month. The end of November stock levels are expected to be low but not dangerously so, as a result of delayed PL-480 arrivals. The early rice crop from the Delta area has begun moving into the milling centers. USOM's index of food prices last week rose by 4 percent to a level 6 percent higher than a month ago and 34 percent higher than a year ago. Non-food consumer prices went up 3 percent to a level 6 percent over last and 18 percent over last year. The Vietnamese piaster continued to weaken in terms of hard currencies and gold.

4. Psychological

A. Vietnamese popular attitudes during the week reflected continuing feeling that the war was going badly for the Viet Cong and increasing concern over economic matters.

Lodge

⁵ Not printed. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S)