

responsibility of office or, actually, direct participation in the governmental process. This leadership is hypersensitive to affronts to its honor or present political position, and to any recrudescence of what it considers "Neo-Diemist" or "Catholic" authority. The leadership is also divided among itself and jockeying for primacy within the Buddhist movement in a manner such that no contender for politico-ecclesiastical power can afford to let another appear more militant than he. (In many ways the Buddhist movement in SVN bears striking analogies to the Civil Rights movement in the U.S.)

At the moment the Buddhist leaders, particularly Tri Quang, are calling for Premier Huong's ouster. Actually, this demand may be a bargaining counter. When Huong came to power, Tri Quang was ready to accept him, but anti-Huong "out" politicians got the ear of Tam Chau in mid-November and persuaded Tam Chau to lend his tacit support to anti-Huong demonstrations. To prevent Tam from usurping the mantle of militancy, Tri Quang moved to the head of the anti-Huong parade.

The Buddhists can probably be placated and Huong simultaneously kept in office but only if there is a juggling of personnel in Huong's cabinet and in the make-up of the compromise body which emerges to replace the HNC. To keep the Buddhists on the reservation it will be necessary for discreet overtures to be made to Tri Quang and to other leaders to flatter them by soliciting their views and, more importantly, to sell them on the need for not opposing Huong and Suu, if only to maintain the appearance of governmental continuity. In turn, however, their advice will have to be sought on the composition of the successor to the HNC and on cabinet changes. These soundings would have to be undertaken by both Vietnamese and Americans. The process will be delicate and time is fast running out. If started at once, however, and if reasonable Buddhist personnel demands are met, they can perhaps be kept in line during the critical days ahead.

On the US side, such soundings might perhaps best be taken by a special Washington emissary. His presence and functions would obviously have to be carefully coordinated with Ambassador Taylor, but such an emissary could play a useful role as a lightning rod, a soothing balm to hypersensitive Vietnamese pride, and a communicator between presently contending elements in Saigon.

17. Personal Notes of a Meeting With President Johnson¹

Washington, January 6, 1965, 5:03-6:44 p.m.

- 1) Basic Prognosis
- 2) Reprisals Plus
- 3) Max to stay?
- 4) Dependents
- 5) Lansdale et al.
- 6) Fraley—Melvin—Lansdale etc. forced out 1 year—relationship with VC generals.

Saigon Political Situation

DR reports on CFR meeting²

UN? might take 2 days to deal with Morse.

DR—we can't fail to make every effort to change the situation on the scene. Because the alternatives are so grim. More optimistic than others.

RSM—We should do all we can in DR's terms—but it won't be enough unless we do more. Lansdale has some ideas: better contact w/Vietnamese. Conein³ contact w/Khanh lost—lack effective contact w/students. Lack effective relations w/Buddhists. Free-wheeling one-man band. When Richardson was thrown out by Lodge,

RSM reads from Max's famous conversation with the four generals.⁴ (Which I sent to the President last night.)

Alexis Johnson's cable showing

LBJ: Don't you think that effect of withdrawing Taylor? Whatever pretense.

RSM: If we're heading for a plateau; then Max can come back w/some success.

McGB: on Taylor vs. Alexis Johnson

¹ Source: Johnson Library, Papers of McGeorge Bundy. No classification marking. These notes were handwritten by McGeorge Bundy for his personal use and were not an official record of this meeting. No other record of the discussion has been found. Present at the meeting were the President, Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, and Ball. The information on the time of the meeting and the attendance is taken from the President's Daily Diary. (Ibid.)

² Rusk met with the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on January 5. (Ibid., Rusk Appointment Book)

³ Colonel Lucien Conein.

⁴ Apparently a reference to telegram 1870 from Maxwell Taylor, December 20, 1964; see vol. I, p. 1015.

DR: He⁵ could well be used up politically—that happens. Letters of quite junior officers show Alex as load-bearing wall. Mistake to return him⁵—but you could put him in CIA.

Geo Ball: The only answer was a strong man—not a country—a piece of one—damned tired after 20 years. Regime has got smell of death. You can't pin em together. Options are all bad. Risks of escalation too great, if regime remains slippery. We sh'd make heroic effort—but not delude ourselves. We sh'd be looking at diplomatic tracks to a bad end. We can do all manner of Lansdale things—but this doesn't get to root of it. Do we take diplomatic initiative. Do we risk escalation. Keep on till we get asked out.

DR: We in Asia have made bricks w/o mortar for 25 years.

RSM: On Killen—a minor problem

DR: House Committee

LBJ: You haven't.

McGB: Phase II—Planning—strong road to negotiations—public reprisal policy & withdrawal of dependents.

Geo Ball: *Be aware of assumptions* 1) If we escalate the war it will strengthen base.

LBJ: Skeptical of view that escalation can help us in morale.

Geo Ball: Escalation can bring two-way activity, we must be ready to talk.—Larger responses are possible.

McGB: We all agree.

DR: Gulf—reprisal specifics are one thing—but Phase II is quite another.

LBJ: *What is it they want?* How can we go down the reprisal road without being ready.

LBJ: 1) Never have thought reprisals would help stabilize the government. 2) They're not sufficiently effective to bring you to conference table—because escalation is dangerous & pulling out is dangerous. 1) Starting out on getting people out—now 2) now we are going to have reprisals 3) may help to give more stability 4) carefully selected [illegible] retaliation—hope you realize this may cost you your vacations—*great feeling* for Taylor in a tough position.

Charley Bartlett.

LBJ: *Dean Rusk* talks to Bill Fulbright, and then “a static dumb crowd.” 1-1/2 billion Ed. 1-1/2 Poverty. 1 billion Health.

We're off on leaks.—

RSM: Definite policy of using leak.

18. Editorial Note

In telegram 1408 to Saigon, January 6, McGeorge Bundy informed Maxwell Taylor that his series of cables received earlier that day (Documents 9–13) had been “carefully discussed at the highest level.” Bundy indicated that the President had asked him to express his warmest thanks to Taylor as well as his intention to give Taylor a reply by the morning of January 8 (Saigon time). (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S)

Under a covering memorandum of January 7 McGeorge Bundy sent the President a draft reply to Taylor's messages for discussion at a White House meeting scheduled for 4:30 that afternoon. Bundy wrote:

“You can ignore the underlinings—I sent a first and even sketchier draft to Rusk, McNamara, and Ball, and these underlinings are simply for their convenience in noting the suggested changes.”

The attached draft, which is labeled “Draft 2 (changes from Draft 1 underlined)”, bears several revisions in President Johnson's hand. (Johnson Library, National Security File, Vietnam Country File, NODIS-LOR, Vol. I) The reply as sent to Taylor is Document 19.

In telegram 1418 to Saigon, January 7, the Department of State noted that further messages in the series initiated by CAP-64375 should henceforth bear the slug “LOR” to “facilitate prearranged highly restricted handling.” Such messages were to be addressed only to the Secretary of State, “since messenger delivery will be utilized here except in most urgent cases.” (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S) In telegram 1420 to Saigon, McGeorge Bundy informed Taylor that his recommendation that CINCPAC be included in the distribution of high-level cable traffic on Vietnam had been discussed. Bundy remarked:

“We agree that before final decisions are taken, he should be cut in. But recent leaks in Washington have redoubled determination here that preliminary analyses and decisions be private. For this reason it has been decided that we need to hear your reactions to President's message of today before circle is enlarged.” (Ibid.)

⁵ Reference is to Taylor.