

e. Having endorsed an international conference, the communists could be expected to resist bilateral talks. Should the international climate necessitate a reconvening of the Geneva Conference, the United States/RVN/RLG should delay the conference while dangling it before the communists to induce them to make concessions. Meanwhile, the program of graduated military pressures must be continued relentlessly.

f. Undue reliance should not be placed on the USSR as either a mediator or a sole channel of communications to Hanoi and Peking. The Soviets can be expected to seek to advance their own interests at our expense.

g. A central problem in the negotiations would be to develop a system of effective safeguards to ensure that the agreements are carried out faithfully. This matter is treated further in the Appendix.

5. In view of the military considerations involved in negotiating a settlement of the SEAsia conflict, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that:

a. The United States/RVN/RLG not enter into negotiations with the communists until a strong military position has been achieved, to include a reasonable indication that DRV intervention in the RVN and Laos has ceased.

b. This paper be considered in the development of a US position on a settlement of the SEAsia conflict.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:
Earle G. Wheeler
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

199. Memorandum for the Record¹

Washington, March 15, 1965

SUBJECT

Highlights of Conversation with Ambassador Johnson at Baguio²

I had 3-1/2 hours of solid conversation with Ambassador Johnson on the last evening of Baguio. The following were highlights:

¹ Source: Department of State, Bundy Files: Lot 85 D 240, WPB Chron. Top Secret/Eyes Only. Prepared by William Bundy. A note on the source text indicates that copies were sent to Rusk, McNamara, Ball, McGeorge Bundy, Gaud, McNaughton, and Unger.

² The Far East Chiefs of Mission Conference held at Baguio, the Philippines, March 9-11.

1. Saigon had some difficulty getting a clear picture of exactly what our policy was going to be after the first strike. For example, they thought that our second and more general message to all posts³ somewhat expanded the policy as originally stated to Saigon alone, notably in respect to what they interpreted as total freedom of action⁴ in South Vietnam. I told Alex the history of policy development in this period, and that no contradiction or inconsistency had been intended. I also went over in detail the origins of the British approach to the Soviets, which they had also had some difficulty in understanding. The moral seems to be that we should perhaps be a little fuller in our explanation of policy to them. Another point is that the McGeorge Bundy report⁵ never went to Saigon. Query whether it should now do so for background purposes, even though it has been effectively superseded by later policy decisions.

2. In the course of my review of the various policy discussions in Washington, I stressed that the President was particularly anxious to let our policy speak for itself and not to speculate on its implications to the press. I told Alex frankly that we have been somewhat concerned at the extent of backgrounding being done in Saigon in this direction. We also discussed the Kleiman article;⁶ Alex and others had seen Kleiman, largely to attempt to affect the *Times* line, but Alex made clear that his conversation bore no resemblance to the article. Apparently Kleiman himself kept talking about "a political track" and I must say that it remains possible that Kleiman was reflecting his own thinking in large part and merely claiming to have got it from Administration sources. This of course still leaves the mish-mash of specifics about "McNamara-Bundy" and "McNaughton" texts, and Alex quite rightly pointed out that no such labels were even known in Saigon. The mystery is not solved, but my own surmise is that Kleiman put together the burrowings of the last three months and gave it an authoritative label to make a story out of it. Nonetheless, someone certainly did talk to him a little too much.

3. Alex complained mildly about the hasty way in which General Johnson's trip had been arranged and also queried its vast bulk and rank.

³ Presumably the circular telegram of February 18 quoted in part in *Pentagon Papers: Civil Edition*, vol. III, pp. 324-325.

⁴ Presumably a reference to Document 115.

⁵ Document 84.

⁶ A front-page article in *The New York Times* on March 1 by Robert Kleiman describing in detail the development of U.S. policy toward Vietnam during the previous several months and indicating that according to the "highest American and South Vietnamese officials" in Saigon, President Johnson had decided to begin a limited air war against North Vietnam as leverage to reach a negotiated settlement. The Department of State's concern over the Kleiman article and the "apparently increasing problem" of leaks to the press was expressed in telegram 1849 to Saigon, March 1. (Johnson Library, National Security File, Country File, Vietnam, Vol. XXX)

4. Commenting on Seaborn's report of his impressions in Hanoi,⁷ Alex particularly noted Seaborn's impression that Hanoi thought we were in effect putting our allies up to negotiating initiatives, and that our military actions were simply desperation measures and a screen for seeking a way out. I asked whether Seaborn based this impression of Hanoi's attitude on any specific evidence, but Alex seemed to think it was largely deduction and atmospherics. (I have not read the full report of Seaborn's impressions.)

5. Alex was totally negative on MACV taking over the police advisory role, much less USOM as a whole. He reported that Westy felt the same way.

6. Commenting further on General Johnson's mission, Alex expressed the general view that what was needed was less a host of new tactics than giving Westmoreland what he had asked for. He commented that there were a great many requests in the mill which had not been met.

7. Alex said that both he and Ambassador Taylor had been really dubious about the marines going into the north, but had finally been persuaded that the security situation at Da Nang was critical.

8. Alex totally supported Jim Killen and said that Killen now was in full accord with others on the need for continued and indeed increased decentralization. He was also making a marked effort to improve relations between USOM and MACV, and Alex had a number of reports that USOM morale is now better. He thought that Killen was generally doing a fine job, while noting that he tends to take things into his own hands and is still not very good at delegation.

9. Continuing on the theme of whether there should be more decentralization, Alex said he was thoroughly familiar with Peer de Silva's thesis in this direction. He said everyone agreed that the province chief was the key and should be up-graded and subjected to less harassment from Saigon. Organizationally, he thought that the position of the Corps vis-à-vis the province chief was very hard to resolve on any general basis. Westy at one time had favored the abolition of the division level, but did not now think it was practical politics. One major step—which Killen had pushed through—was the arrangement now in force to have funds go directly from the GVN Bureau of the Budget to the province chief, not through the individual ministries.

⁷ The Canadian representative on the International Control Commission for Vietnam, Blair Seaborn, visited Hanoi during the first week of March and, on behalf of the U.S. Government, repeated to a DRV official on March 4 a statement made by Ambassador Cabot in Warsaw on February 24 to PRC Ambassador Wang outlining U.S. objectives in Vietnam. The text of Cabot's statement to Wang is in telegram 942 to Ottawa, February 27. (Department of State, Central Files, POL 27 VIET S) Seaborn reported on his trip in a conversation with U. Alexis Johnson on March 6, which was described in telegram 2880 from Saigon, March 7 (see footnote 3, Document 187).

10. Alex noted that both he and Ambassador Taylor were now trying to give a number of small dinners for Vietnamese leaders. He said that the going was fairly sticky at these, but that they should pay dividends in the long run. Alex made the interesting comment that, as compared with his experience with Chinese, Japanese, and Thai, the Vietnamese were the most difficult group he had ever encountered. They had very little openness and tended to clam up in each other's presence, and the long strains of war had made them very cagey. He noted that the people as a whole simply do not have the sense of humor and capacity to laugh, even in adversity, that the other peoples have.

11. Alex noted that there was some continuing difficulty between MACV and CAS, with the former suspicious that CAS wanted to resume control of the CIDG problem. He said that de Silva was doing all he could to allay this suspicion.

12. Alex said that he himself had come to the central conclusion that, whatever the importance of economic benefits, security was the crucial and necessarily dominant key to the present situation. He felt this was particularly true in the central provinces, where the deteriorating situation now verged on open conventional warfare.

13. Alex thought that the up-grading of the Popular Forces was extremely important, and noted that MACV was now moving some of our Special Forces assets into this field. He said that it was very difficult for the Vietnamese JGS and MACV to get away from their basic feeling that the Popular Forces were simply a third-rate armed force, rather than having an essentially different mission.

14. Alex said that both he and Ambassador Taylor were skeptical that US jets would really have great impact on the situation. He noted that one early operation in Phuoc Tuy had been a complete bust, and said that the fundamental point still applied that air was most useful where GVN units were in definite contact with the VC and really good forward air control was available. He said that Army-Air Force service rivalry continued to plague the whole air problem, and that the dispute of fixed-wing aircraft versus armed helicopters just was not resolved. In the same character, he had a little the feeling [felt slightly] that the allocation of strikes against the north, as between Navy and Air Force, was affected by a feeling that everyone had to get into the act. He wondered if we could not work out a geographical division, with the Air Force taking on southern targets, perhaps up to the 19th Parallel, and the Navy acting above that point. He said that the involved command chain from CINCPAC caused real problems, particularly since the Second Air Division in any case had to handle liaison with the VNAF on the VNAF strikes.

Alex had the impression that experience with the strikes was raising serious doubts whether jets were more effective than A1H's, where the latter could reach the targets. The jets seemed to be more vulnerable to