
103. Memorandum From the Ambassador-Designate to Vietnam
(Lodge) to President Johnson¹

Washington, August 3, 1965.

Following is an excerpt from a memorandum to me from Edward Lansdale² in response to a paper of mine to him on "Solving the 'politico'

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Memos to the President, McGeorge Bundy, Vol. XIII. No classification marking. McGeorge Bundy sent this memorandum to the President on August 3, under cover of a memorandum in which he observed: "Lansdale appears quite ready to take over MACV—and yet he's not all wrong. Can we afford some creative tension?"

² Lodge selected Lansdale to accompany him to Vietnam to establish a special operating staff in the Embassy to work on political action programs with the South Vietnamese Government. Lansdale arrived in Vietnam on August 29 with a hand-picked group of 10 counter-subversion specialists. He was designated as an assistant to Ambassador Lodge and appointed the U.S. liaison representative on the Central Rural Construction Council, created on July 30.

part of the 'Politico-Military' Vietnam problem."³ It contains ideas of which, I believe, you should be aware:

"'Politico'. Your paper states sound conclusions when it speaks of the need for an affirmative answer to the threat of Communist-Subversion/Terrorism", the need for good practical politics in Vietnam, the fact that our other programs even though excellent are no substitute for a real political program, and the need for underscoring the truth of promises through actual performance. Personally, I don't see how the Communists can be defeated without these positive steps. The military can suppress the Communist forces, even keep them suppressed by continued military action, but cannot defeat them short of genocide unless our side puts the war on a political footing in Viet Nam.

"The enemy in Vietnam understands thoroughly the political nature of the war he is waging. The enemy sees his every act as a political act, and uses psychological, military, and socio-economic weapons to gain his political goals. This is a strict rule the enemy borrowed from Clausewitz. Lenin, Mao, Ho, and Giap have been clear and firm on this basic rule. The Viet Cong have obeyed it amazingly well. Our side has broken this rule over and over again. It is being broken daily right now.

"Thus, when you ask my help to get a Counter-Subversion/Terrorism program moving, you really are asking me to help you to get our side to start obeying and applying the prime rule of the war in Vietnam. It isn't separate from the other programs. It is the basis upon which the war in Vietnam will be won or lost. The psychological, military, and socio-economic programs are its instruments, not ends in themselves. Political bankruptcy in Vietnam and the direct use of U.S. combat forces complicate your task vastly. (A U.S. commander, tasked to attack a suspected enemy position, is going to clobber it first by bombing or artillery to cut his own U.S. casualties to a minimum when they attack; casualties of Vietnamese non-combatants must be secondary to his responsibility to his own command and mission.) I point this out to underscore the fact that something brand new, perhaps of considerable difference from anything previous, will have to be worked out in Vietnam to put the war on the essential political footing. It might require heroic measures, such as moving non-combatants out of Central Vietnam into the far South, to permit the military threat to be resolved conclusively in Central Vietnam by military means while non-combatant refugees get a real chance at a new life. Again, this could be a wrong move. You are going to need some exceptionally expert help to solve this vital problem; for many reasons, it's your biggest."

³ Not found.