

Planning

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RECORD

EIGHTH
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
CONFERENCE

6 MAY 1963

HQ CINCPAC

(12)

CAMP H. M. SMITH, HAWAII

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6 May 1963

Item 2 - Comprehensive Plan, Republic of Vietnam

c. Force Structure

(1) Relationship of reductions in U.S. strength with growth of GVN self-sufficiency. (Presented by COMUSMACV)

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION:

1. GEN ADAMS made a presentation of U.S. units in RVN and comparable RVNAF units necessary to be trained to take over those missions now being accomplished by U.S. units. The cost of the transition was shown. The Phase-out of certain MACV units was depicted without a requirement for replacement by RVN type units. There were no significant problems with regard to the planned phase-out of U.S. air type units and replacement by RVNAF air units. However, a considerable problem was forecast with respect to the RVNAF capability to provide necessary technical support, maintenance and communications.

(42)

DECISIONS MADE AND ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN:

1. Draw up training plans for the RVNAF that will permit us to start an earlier withdrawal of U.S. personnel than proposed under the plan presented. (COMUSMACV)

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REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM 6 May 1963

Item 2 - Comprehensive Plan, Republic of Vietnam

- d. Plan to withdraw 1000 U. S. military personnel from RVN
by December 1963.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS:

1. See Item 2. c. (page 2-c-1) and Item 4. a. (page 4-a-2).

DECISIONS MADE AND ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN:

See decisions on Item 2. c. (page 2-c-1) and Item 4. a. (page 4-a-2).

GEN HARKINS stated that the training program is a part of the Comprehensive Plan and in many of the type units, training cannot be expedited over that now planned in view of lead-time requirements.

MR HILSMAN brought up the subject of a base line from which to compute the 1,000 withdrawal.

GEN HARKINS emphasized that he did not want to gather up 1,000 U.S. personnel and have them depart with bands playing, flags flying, etc. This would have a bad effect on the Vietnamese, to be pulling out just when it appears they are winning.

SEC McNAMARA stated this would have to be handled carefully due to the psychological impact. However, there should be an intensive training program of RVNAF to allow removal of U.S. units rather than individuals. (Note was taken that ADM FELT had

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previously forwarded to the JCS, by CINCPAC message DTG 030417Z 630917Z May, a review of current VNAF training programs and an outline plan for expediting such training.) THE SECRETARY went on to state that many jobs are being accomplished by U.S. personnel that could be assumed by RVNAF. A plan should be laid down quickly, within the next couple of weeks, for training the RVNAF. DOD will expedite equipment. This training should cover as examples, liaison type aircraft and signal units.

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DECISIONS MADE AND ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN:

1. Submit a plan to accomplish training of personnel to allow reduction of U. S. personnel. (See also decision, Item 2. c. (1).)
(COMUSMACV)
2. GEN WOOD and ADM RILEY will work on the equipment part at the Washington level.

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CPSVN

FORECAST OF PHASE - OUT OF US FORCES

(In Thousands)

<u>ORGANIZATION</u>	<u>FY 63</u>	<u>FY 64</u>	<u>FY 65</u>	<u>FY 66</u>	<u>FY 67</u>	<u>FY 68</u>
Hq USMACV	.3	.4	.4	.1	.0	.0
Hq MAAG	3.0	3.1	3.1	1.7	1.6	1.5
2D AIR DIV	2.2	4.1	3.8	1.1	.0	.0
USASG (V)	5.1	7.0	6.2	2.7	.0	.0
USMC Helicopter Unit	.5	.5	.5	.0	.0	.0
HSAS	.5	.5	.5	.3	.0	.0
TOTAL:	11.6	15.6	14.5	5.9	1.6	1.5

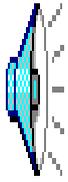
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c. Relationship of Reductions in US Strength to Growth in Self-Sufficiency.

In connection with this presentation, made by COMUSMACV (attached hereto), the Secretary of Defense stated that the phase-out appears too slow. He directed that training plans be developed for the GVN by CINCPAC which will permit a more rapid phase-out of US forces, stating specifically that we should review our plans for pilot training with the view to accelerating it materially. He made particular point of the desirability of speeding up training of helicopter pilots, so that we may give the Vietnamese our copters and thus be able to move our own forces out. ACTION - Joint Staff (J-3); message directive to CINCPAC; info COMUSMACV.

Discussion



Tape 114A49 Transcript

Courtesy of George Eliades

JFK: That's going to be an assumption, that it's going well, that if does go well—

McN: No sir. One of the major premises—two major premises we have—first, I believe we can complete the military campaign in the first corps areas in sixty-four and the fourth corps area in sixty-five.* Secondly, if it extends beyond that period, we believe we can train the Vietnamese to take over the essential functions and withdraw the bulk of our forces. And this thousand is in conjunction with that, and I have a list of the units here that are represented by that number—

JFK: Can't they...

Bundy?: What's the point of doing that?

McN: We need a way to get out of Vietnam. This is a way of doing it. And to leave forces there when they're not needed, I think is wasteful and complicates both their problem and ours.

[* “Corps areas” is my correction of Eliades’ transcription; context suggests McNamara was referring here to the four Corps Areas of South Vietnam, of which the Fourth was the Mekong Delta. – JG]

McN: I think Mr. President, we must have a means of disengaging from this area. We must show our country that means. The only slightest difference between Max and me in this entire report is in this one estimate of whether or not we can win the war in '64 in the upper three territories and in '65 in the fourth. I'm not entirely sure of that. But I am sure that if we don't meet those dates in the sense of ending the major military campaigns, we nonetheless can withdraw the bulk of our US forces according to the schedule we've laid out, worked out, because we can train the Vietnamese to do the job.

To illustrate the point, we have two L-19 squadrons over there. These are very important. They are the artillery observers and the fire control observers. But it's very simple to train Vietnamese to fly L-19's. Now why should we leave our L-19 squadrons there? At the present time, we've set up a training program to give them seven weeks of language training, four months of flying school, three weeks of transition training with the L-19's, and they can go out and do L-19 work. And we set it up in Vietnam. It's being run by US officers, and it's worked very well. Now I think we ought to do that for every one of our major elements. We've talked about—

October 2, 1963, 11 am
meeting

But I am sure that if we don't meet those dates in the sense of ending the major military campaigns, we nonetheless can withdraw the bulk of our US forces according to the schedule we've laid out, worked out, because we can train the Vietnamese to do the job.

Robert McNamara

October 2, 1963

JFK: My only reservation about it is, if it commits us to a kind of a, if the war doesn't continue to go well, it will look like we were overly optimistic. And I'm not sure what benefit we get out at this time by announcing a thousand.

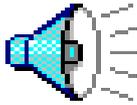
McN: Mr. President, we have the thousand split by units. So that if the war doesn't go well, we can say that these thousand would not have influenced the course of action.

JFK: And the advantage?

McN: And the advantage of taking them out is that we can say to the Congress and the people that we do have a plan for reducing the exposure of US combat personnel to the guerilla actions in South Vietnam. Actions that the people of South Vietnam should gradually develop a capability to suppress themselves. And I think this will be of great value to us in meeting the very strong views of Fulbright and others that we're bogged down in Asia and we'll be there for decades.

Meeting of October 2, 1963
6.05 PM

Decision



McNamara: Mr. President, we would like to have formal approval of items 1, 2 and 3. One I think you've already approved.

JFK: [unclear] next month brings us militarily

McNamara: Not really, because the thousand people are just not needed out there, in terms of carrying out certain functions. There's no reason [unclear].

JFK: well I think, the only thing is, is hardly, from a public point of view, a withdrawal just would seem illogical. It's going to have to be pulling them out rather than just doing it by attrition. I think we're doing it to have some impact, then I think we can't do it unless [the borders?], otherwise to we ought to just do it by rotation.

McNamara: That's the way we've proposed to do it.

JFK: Rather than any formal announcement in the near future.

McNamara: Or we can do it just through normal attrition, normal rotation.

[people talking over each other]

JFK: let's just go ahead and do it, without making a public statement about it.

Alright.b

October 5, 1963
9:30 am meeting

**JFK: let's just go ahead and do it,
without making a public statement
about it.**

October 5, 1963

Implementation



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CM File

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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

CM-935-63
4 October 1963

DECLASSIFIED BY JOINT STAFF
DATE: JUL 01 1997

MEMORANDUM FOR: General LeMay
General Wheeler
Admiral McDonald
General Shoup

SUBJECT: South Vietnam Actions

Following approval by the President and the National Security Council of the recommendations included in the report of the McNamara mission to South Vietnam, I have drafted the Enclosure which I request you be prepared to discuss at the Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, Friday, 4 October 1963.

Taylor Box B 1

MAXWELL D. TAYLOR
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

202-1002-10093

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FROM: JCS
TO: CINCPAC
INFO: COMUSMACV
SUBJECT: Approved Actions for South Vietnam

1. On 2 October the President approved recommendations relating to military matters contained in the trip report of the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. The following actions derived from those recommendations are directed:

a. COMUSMACV will review with Diem or other appropriate GVN official, those changes in military plans and programs necessary to complete the military campaign in the Northern and Central areas (I, II and III Corps) by the end of 1964, and in the Delta (IV Corps) by the end of 1965. This review should consider, but not be confined to, the need for such changes as:

- (1) A further shift of military emphasis and strength to the Delta (IV Corps).
- (2) An increase in the military tempo in all Corps areas, so that all combat troops are in the field an average of 20 days out of 30 and static missions are ended.
- (3) Emphasis on "clear and hold operations" instead of terrain sweeps which have little permanent value.
- (4) The expansion of personnel in combat units to full authorized strength.
- (5) The training and arming of hamlet militia at an accelerated rate, especially in the Delta.
- (6) A consolidation of the strategic hamlet program, especially in the Delta, and action to insure that future strategic hamlets are not built until they can be protected, and until civic action programs can be introduced.

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b. The program currently in progress to train Vietnamese forces will be reviewed and accelerated as necessary to insure that all essential functions visualized to be required for the projected operational environment, to include those now performed by U.S. military units and personnel, can be assumed properly by the Vietnamese by the end of calendar year 1965.

All planning will be directed towards preparing RVN forces for the withdrawal of all U.S. special assistance units and personnel by the end of calendar year 1965. The U.S. Comprehensive Plan, Vietnam will be revised to bring it into consonance with these objectives, and to reduce planned residual (post 1965) MAAG strengths to approximately pre-insurgency levels.

c. Execute the plan to withdraw 1,000 U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963 per your DTG 212201Z July, and as approved for planning by JCS DTG 062042Z September. Previous guidance on the public affairs annex is altered to the extent that the action will now be treated in low key, as the initial increment of U.S. forces whose presence is no longer required because (a) Vietnamese forces have been trained to assume the function involved; or (b) the function for which they came to Vietnam has been completed.

2. In order to measure progress achieved in meeting the operational and training goals outlined in 1a and 1b above, criteria, in the form of specific checkpoints, will be established now against which progress can be evaluated on a quarterly basis. Reports will be revised to reflect progress towards attainment of the checkpoints and goals. Evaluation of these reports will provide the basis for continued leverage on the GVN to maintain the required rate of progress.

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All planning will be directed towards preparing RVN forces for the withdrawal of all U.S. special assistance units and personnel by the end of calendar year 1965.

JFK's Plans to Withdraw
By James K. Galbraith

In response to The Adventures of Arthur* (November 8, 2007)

To the Editors:

In his review of Arthur Schlesinger's Journals, 1952–2000 [NYR, November 8], Joseph Lelyveld writes that while "Kennedy had now and then spoken in private about withdrawing [from Vietnam] after the 1964 election; when he died it was a faint hope, not yet a plan." This is incorrect.

Schlesinger himself says otherwise; in Robert Kennedy and His Times he writes of the "first application" in October 1963 "of Kennedy's phased withdrawal plan." Robert McNamara goes further, in his 1995 memoir In Retrospect, to speak of "President Kennedy's decision on October 2 [1963] to begin the withdrawal of US forces."

A presidential decision requires a plan. The elements of a decision must include: (a) previous planning, reflected in military documents in this case; (b) discussion of the plan; (c) a decision to accept or reject the plan, reflected in a decision document; and (d) steps to implement the plan. In the case of JFK and withdrawal from Vietnam, all these elements are present.

We have records of the 8th Secretary of Defense conference in Honolulu on May 6, 1963, which tell of a "Comprehensive Plan" for Vietnam, including: "plan to withdraw 1000 US personnel from RVN by December 1963." McNamara also ordered that "training plans" be developed for the Vietnamese to permit "a more rapid phase-out" of the remaining US forces.

On October 2, 1963, these plans were discussed at the White House. We have the tape. McNamara states to Kennedy: "And the advantage of taking them out is that we can say to the Congress and the people that we do have a plan for reducing the exposure of US combat personnel to the guerilla actions in South Vietnam."

On October 5, 1963, at a meeting at 9:30 AM, Kennedy made the formal decision to implement the withdrawal plan. Again, we have the tape. On October 11, the White House issued National Security Action Memorandum 263, which speaks of "the implementation of plans to withdraw" troops from Vietnam.

A memorandum conveying the decision, from JCS Chair Maxwell Taylor to his military colleagues, had already been sent. It states: "All planning will be directed towards preparing RVN forces for the withdrawal of all US special assistance units and personnel by the end of calendar year 1965. The US Comprehensive Plan, Vietnam, will be revised to bring it into consonance with these objectives...."

For Mr. Lelyveld to state that there was no plan, but only a "faint hope" of withdrawal, is clearly at odds with the plain wording of the source documents. There was a plan to withdraw US forces from Vietnam, beginning with the first thousand by December 1963, and almost all of the rest by the end of 1965. Moreover, President Kennedy had approved that plan. It was the actual policy of the United States on the day Kennedy died.

These facts are documented in my article "Exit Strategy," in The Boston Review of October/November 2003, available at www.bostonreview.net/BR28.5/galbraith.html. Copies of the original documents are available on request.

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