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November 21 Meeting with Saigon Advisers

The President opened the meeting by saying that he wanted periodic coordinated reports by Ambassador Bunker and the South Vietnamese leadership.

Ambassador Bunker said he had discussed a "Report to the Nation." He said there is a need for more non-military views.

The President showed the group a Christian Science Monitor article on the views of various dissenting Senators about Vietnam. "This is the type of thing which the American people are seeing every day. We need to get them more information of a factual nature."

Secretary Rusk said that Governor Romney is going to Saigon. The Secretary said he had a good meeting with Romney, urging him to visit the South Vietnamese units.

The President said it was his judgment that Richard Nixon would capture the nomination.

The President asked if State and Defense had done all they could to get the additional troops from other allied countries -- and also to get to Vietnam the additional troops from the U. S. which already had been approved in line with General Westmoreland's earlier request. "The clock is ticking." We need to get all the additional troops as fast we we can.

Secretary Rusk asked how much of the support for the Korean troops are we providing.

General Westmoreland said we provide most of the support for the Korean troops out of main supply depots.

Secretary McNamara said we should ask the Koreans for combat troops not support troops.

The President said we need somebody like Ambassador Harriman to sit down with the Koreans to talk about their additional troops.

Secretary McNamara said we need a B52 authorization from the Thais.

Secretary Rusk said that the Thais were nervous about the number of U. S. troops in their country.

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The President asked Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland to find the best way to put the best troops in the best shape we can as quickly as possible. The President said that we should let it be known in the United States if indeed the South Vietnamese troops are as good as General Westmoreland and Ambassador Bunker have been saying they are.

General Westmoreland said he is assigning a U. S. Information Officer to each ARVN Commander to help improve the relations of the South Vietnamese troops with the American press.

The President asked about any additional needs in the pacification area.

Secretary McNamara said he would provide 500 additional officers for pacification work by February.

Bob Komer said he was for 3551 officers.

Secretary McNamara said the military is short of this type of man. He said there are officers in Vietnam who can be used in the pacification program, and the military will train the remaining 2600.

Secretary Rusk asked if any military reservists could be brought back to active duty to fill this need.

Secretary McNamara said no. He said, "These are fighting advisers" rather than officers who are involved in non-combat responsibilities.

Bob Komer said he has confidence that General Westmoreland's staff would assist in providing pacification personnel. General Wheeler said that these men were mostly Army and Marine Captains.

Secretary McNamara said you cannot get these officers any faster by calling up reserve personnel. Secretary McNamara said that \$60 million have been requested for additional roads. He said he was not sure how this amount would be raised, but that it would be arranged.

The President stressed the need to bring the South Vietnamese government to the center of the stage stressing tax needs, anti-corruption measures and a need for a reform image.

Bob Komer asked if the President would permit the Saigon aides to tell the South Vietnamese that these were the President's personal views in order to expedite action on these recommendations. The President approved this.

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The President said a great deal of the ammunition for dissent in this country was a product of the Saigon press corps. He asked the status of Barry Zorthian.

Secretary Rusk said the State Department was working on that now.

The President said the main front of the war is here in the United States, and asked about the status of

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Secretary Rusk said the South Vietnamese government is not too anxious to proceed on this matter.

CIA Director Helms said that the position of the South Vietnamese is that the Viet Cong ought to release somebody before the South Vietnamese government does.

The President asked if there is much hope that will lead to something else.

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CIA Director Helms said no. Helms said it could lead to additional prisoners being exchanged, but he doubted any negotiations would result.

The President asked if there is anything else that the United States government should be doing to bring about peace.

Ambassador Bunker said that we have tried everything. The more efforts we make now, the more Ho believes we want to get out.

General Westmoreland said that he believes that Ho interprets our efforts as a sign of weakness.

Secretary McNamara said we should push our view on the South Vietnamese to get them moving on

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Ambassador Bunker said that these things take time, that we cannot rush it. The Viet Cong are their enemy we must remember.

The President asked Walt Rostow to assemble the data on four or five peace efforts we have initiated. "I don't expect to do any more talking until I hear from them. There has been enough talk on this." The President asked that a speech be written which would outline the failure of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese to respond to any of our peace initiatives.

Ambassador Bunker said that the San Antonio speech was most forthcoming. "I do not see how we could have gone any further in our offer."

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Walt Rostow said [redacted] is the most promising way if we are serious. The key to [redacted] is the establishment of confidence with Thieu about this type of dialogue.

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The President said there are four areas for immediate attention. The first is the expediting of additional troops to Vietnam. The second is the equipping of the South Vietnamese army with the best equipment. Secretary McNamara said the Joint Chiefs of Staff are working on this presently.

The third area was the placement of B52's in Thailand. Secretary Rusk said he would discuss this with Ambassador Unger. The United States wants to place 25 rather than 50 B52's in Thailand.

The fourth area is the need for additional road money. Secretary McNamara said he would try to get this.

The President asked what would United States policy be on the proposal of pauses over the holidays. He pointed out that the Viet Cong had added to the number of days.

Secretary Rusk said that the government should announce an offer to meet Hanoi about extending the truce. As before, he does not expect that they will meet with us.

General Wheeler said that the U. S. Troops have rules of engagement which will protect our troops. He pointed out that last Tet North Vietnam moved 23,000 tons of supplies just north of the DMZ.

General Wheeler said we must assume they will do everything possible to take maximum advantage of these pauses.

The President said, "We should announce what we are going to do and then let them have it" if they violate the truce. "We have been too tolerant of these people."

Bob Komer asked about the possibility of a reciprocal military standdown.

General Wheeler said we cannot do it.

The President said we make an agreement and stand by it. They make an agreement and break it.

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The President asked why we are so silent about the Cambodian situation, particularly in light of recent press reports about base camps along the Cambodian border.

Secretary Rusk said that Prince Sihanouk has invited 20 newsmen to visit Cambodia and is also writing the United Nations on this matter. The Secretary said this will provide us a good opportunity to invite the United Nations to act on this matter of Cambodia being used as a sanctuary for North Vietnamese troops.

The President said he was tired of Sihanouk's actions.

Secretary McNamara said we need to surface more information about Cambodia.

General Westmoreland explained that his men had tipped off the two United States newsmen about the location of the camp which had been discussed in the press this morning. "This is the one thing on which we can get cooperation from the Saigon press."

The President said we should get Ambassador Goldberg to deliver some speeches on this.

The President asked about recommendations for operations inside Laos.

General Westmoreland said he was anxious to initiate action in base area 607. He pointed out that the missiles that hit Da Nang came through this base area. He said this action would require two Vietnamese battalions and a raid of three to four days.

Ambassador Bunker said he was anxious to see this act taken. "80% of their supplies come through Laos. "To give them a free hand is suicidal."

General Wheeler said over the past 12-18 months the enemy has built a truck road through this area. He said the Joint Chiefs of Staff agree that within the next 60 to 90 days General Westmoreland should be authorized to initiate action in this area.

The President asked about the increase in the number of planes lost. "I am beginning to agree with Bob McNamara that it does not appear the targets are worth the loss in planes."

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General Wheeler explained that the North Vietnamese have changed their tactics. They are firing Sams in a barrage pattern. In addition the MIGS have developed new tactics. He said the United States forces are going to have to vary the pattern of attack.

The President emphasized "the clock is ticking." Get the targets you have to hit. The bombing arouses so much opposition in this country.

General Wheeler said that we lost 25 aircraft this month compared with 42 in May.

Secretary McNamara said it was his opinion that the raids were not worth the losses in aircraft. He pointed out that five aircraft were lost against Phu Yen.

Secretary asked about a possible increase in the number of sorties being used in close support of ground troops.

General Westmoreland said it was no problem on this since B52's were used for mass bombing and he has pre-emptive authority over tactical air missions. "The B52's have done a fantastic job."

The President asked about the reports of large scale civilian casualties.

Secretary McNamara said we have killed a lot of civilians, but not as many as the enemy claims.

General Westmoreland said, "We have killed fewer civilians in this war than in any previous war in which America has been involved."

The President said there is a need to remove the emphasis on statistics in battle casualties.

Ambassador Bunker pointed out we report not only men killed in action and hospital cases, but casualties of a non-authorized nature. In contrast the North Vietnamese report only the ones who are hospitalized.

The President asked why do we continue to release these statistics, especially since they make it appear that U. S. troops are suffering more casualties than South Vietnamese troops.

General Westmoreland said we report these figures because the pattern was established, and because "we would catch hell from the press if we were to change the system."

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The President said just because we have been doing something wrong for several years doesn't mean we can't correct our error.

Secretary McNamara said he dared not stop reporting these casualties because of the fear of a tremendous press attack.

General Westmoreland says he has the system of reporting under examination by his staff.

Ambassador Bunker said it would be good to bring out a comparison of the Vietnamese casualties which more accurately reflect the situation.

Secretary McNamara said it was a fact that our regular Army losses are higher than the South Vietnamese regular army losses, "but if you include popular and regional losses, their losses are higher than ours."

The American press believes that we are lying on any body counts.

General Westmoreland said that survey details have found that the United States counts of enemy dead are reasonable and the reporting system is "If anything, conservative."

General Westmoreland says he has hard evidence that the enemy KIA is larger than reported, since there is no way of determining how many die from artillery and aerial bombardment. "I have told the American press that I will investigate any incident in which they believe are counts are bad."

General Westmoreland said he was very skeptical of any proposal to eliminate or change the method of casualty reporting since this is not a live issue in Saigon now. We have more to lose than to gain by changing the system.

General Wheeler said that we are at an obvious disadvantage in that we cannot stop reporting our figures. If we were to stop we would have many charges that the war is being lost rather than the current accusation that there is a stalemate.

General Westmoreland said we cannot help that our casualties are reported since there are reporters with most of the large units in Vietnam. It would be a matter of our casualties being reported and the enemy casualties not being reported. I believe the press in Saigon are reasonably satisfied that we are trying to give an accurate record of casualties.

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The President said that the press in this country does not believe this. They believe we are lying to them about these figures.

Ambassador Bunker agreed with the President.

Secretary McNamara said he believed that the press in this country was skeptical of the figures but that he agreed with General Westmoreland that we should not change the method of reporting.

General Westmoreland said the answer to this is to convince the press that the counts are reasonably accurate.

The President suggested that General Westmoreland appoint a four or five member committee of correspondents to investigate the system of body counts.

Secretary McNamara agreed with this recommendation indicating that it would strengthen our credibility with the press and the American public.

The President said no matter what others may believe, this is an issue in this country and we need a committee to investigate this.

General Westmoreland said that he has such a program to get reporters on teams to count bodies themselves. "We are on the right track on this."

General Wheeler said the best evidence of our figures come from the other side in the form of captured documents.

The President then asked plans for departure by Ambassador Bunker, Ambassador Komer and General Westmoreland.

General Westmoreland said he was leaving on Wednesday, Ambassador Bunker said he was leaving on Friday. Ambassador Komer said he was leaving with Ambassador Bunker.

General Westmoreland said we should encourage more groups, not less, to visit Vietnam and get a first hand check. He suggested that more preachers, more educators, more Congressmen be invited. The President added to that group, groups of women

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Ambassador Bunker summarized by saying that we have set our priorities for the United States program in Vietnam. He said that President Thieu and Vice President Ky have almost identical priorities which is encouraging.

The President asked if President Thieu planned to come to the United States.

Ambassador Bunker said yes at a later date when he settles down the government a bit.

Secretary Rusk said he favors President Thieu coming to the United States, but only if he brought Ky with him.

General Westmoreland said he had no fear of any coups taking place, but that if a situation should arise he thought he could handle it.

General Westmoreland summarized by saying that the quantities of men and materiel were fine. The M16's are coming in at a steady clip. There are a few shortages but nothing that cannot be taken care of easily.

Secretary McNamara said that we are going all out to get choppers and that the Colt Company was working around the clock to get M16s.

General Westmoreland said there is no problem with the number of fixed wing aircraft. He said there is a need for more one and a-half ton trucks. He said, "the men and materiel we are getting are all I can reasonably expect. I would have difficulty absorbing troops much faster."

General Westmoreland said that South Vietnamese troops would be equipped with the M16's.

The President said his main concern was that General Westmoreland get what he wants as soon as possible.

General Westmoreland said from a practical standpoint he had all he needed at this stage. Secretary McNamara said General Westmoreland would have 106 battalions -- 102 by December 31 and the others by April.

General Westmoreland said that 525,000 men will be a well balanced, hard-hitting force.

The President said he hopes we will lower the boom to get the extra troops which they have promised.

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General Westmoreland said the main problem is one of leadership, and that we must watch closely to strike a balance of quantity and quality among the Vietnam troops.

Komer stressed needs in two areas. The first was a need for an all our priority attached to Viet Cong infrastructure. He said he needed not more than \$10 million for detention centers.

The second is the need for civil and military consolidation. We need more good military people. Komer said he would like Bill Colby, one of Dick Helms' top men, to go to Vietnam to assist in pacification.

The President said for him to get the best people available including Colby if Helms could spare him and Colby wanted to go.

The President said Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland should figure out a way to get Thieu to establish better rapport with the American press.

Secretary Rusk expressed his appreciation on behalf of the official Washington family for the excellent leadership being provided by Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland.

George Christian pointed out that the refugee problem was a big one. He mentioned that the American press was beginning to place a great deal of emphasis on this problem. Ambassador Komer said we would try to do better on this.

George Christian stressed the need to get a man with known prestige to handle the information duties within Saigon.

The President and Secretary Rusk agreed with Christian.

General Wheeler said he, Ambassador Bunker, General Westmoreland and Bob Komer went to see General Eisenhower at Walter Reed yesterday. "General Eisenhower expressed his strong support for our position."

The President said he wanted General Wheeler to tell General Goodpaster that we want to make available to General Eisenhower everything the President knows.

General Westmoreland asked for approval to take away from AID the responsibility for the war veterans advisory commission and place it under his responsibility. The President approved this action.

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