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MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT
November 1, 1963, 10:00 AM, Subject: Vietnam

Others present: Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, Attorney General Director McCone, General Taylor, General Krulak, Under Secretary Harriman, Assistant Secretary Hilsman Assistant Secretary Manning, Assistant Secretary Sylvester, Assistant Secretary Bundy, Mr. Colby (CIA) Mr. Cooper (CIA), Mr. Salinger, General Clifton, Mr. Bundy, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Bromley Smith

Mr. Colby of CIA gave a detailed briefing of the current situation, illustrated by a map giving the order of battle of the pro-Diem and pro-coup forces. There is attached a copy of a CIA memorandum on the progress of the coup in Saigon as of 8:00 AM EST today.

Mr. McCone read a summary of the last critic message received prior to the meeting.

Secretary Rusk said that it appeared that almost all military forces, with the exception of the Navy command and General Tung of the Special Forces, were supporting the rebel generals. If the generals hold together, the coup forces will prevail. It is not yet known whether Diem and Nhu will give up.

Secretary Rusk said some instructions to Lodge would be sent on minor points such as postponement of his return to the U.S. this week end. The first major task would be the building of a new government in Vietnam. A current problem is how to overcome press speculation with respect to U.S. involvement in the coup. It can truthfully be said that the U.S. was not privy to this coup planning, which had been planned and carried out by Vietnamese. Americans were not involved in the planning nor were any Americans involved in the fighting. We had been receiving reports of coups for many months. The major problem is how we can get everyone behind an effort to expedite the winning of the war against the Viet Cong.

The President asked how we could square recognition of the Vietnamese rebel government which had overthrown a constitutional government with our position of not recognizing the rebel government which had overthrown the constitutional government in Honduras. He asked that a paper be prepared on this subject so that everyone in the government would be saying the same thing in response to this question.

Additional material has been released as a result of this review.

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By MMK NARA, Date 6/21/99

Secretary Rusk said he did not think this would be much of a public opinion problem. Stalin was a civilian while Eisenhower was a general. If the Vice President of Vietnam, as is reported, sides with the rebels, it might be possible to make him the head of the government if and when Diem resigns. The facade of constitutionalism would thus be preserved.

Director McCone thought it was important to convey to the rebel generals the importance of their maintaining a semblance of constitutionalism. Secretary Rusk replied that the generals have indicated they are aware of the importance of making the best case for the legality of their government.

In response to the President's question, General Taylor summarized the U.S. forces which are moving toward Vietnam. A group of marines will arrive off Cap Saint Jacques this evening, but with limited air cover. Two aircraft carriers will be within supporting distance tomorrow, one in the morning and the second in the early evening.

Secretary Rusk said the coup forces apparently had control of all internal Vietnam communications with the exception of a radio net operated in Diem's palace. If this is true, Diem will have difficulty in rallying support from outside Saigon. Mr. Colby added that Diem could communicate with corps headquarters, but could not broadcast to civilians.

The President asked why Diem's troops were moving out of the palace as reported in the message read by Mr. McCone. Secretary Rusk replied that possibly Diem was trying to escape or that troops formerly loyal to Diem were defecting to the rebel side.

The President asked what we knew about the movement of pro-Diem forces outside Saigon. Director McCone said that we did not know of any movements, but that pro-Diem forces near the palace and in Saigon had been neutralized by the capture of their leaders.

The President again referred to the need of a clear statement of why our policy toward the Honduras regime is different than our policy toward the new regime in Saigon. Secretary Rusk said that we would make clear our strong support for the prompt restoration of civilian government in Vietnam.

The full text of the latest cable from Saigon, summarized earlier by Director McCone, was brought into the meeting and read aloud by the President.

Secretary McNamara suggested that the press be told of the movement of U.S. forces which had been ordered as a precautionary measure to insure the safety of U.S. personnel in Vietnam.

Mr. McCone said he had received a request from Senator Russell's office to brief on Vietnam development before noon today. the President agreed that it would be all right for Mr. McCone to brief Russell personally, but if the request involved a briefing of the committee, he believed we should hold off until later in the day when the palace forces may have capitulated.

The President reiterated the importance of making clear publicly that this was not a U.S. coup and that we had heard reports of coups during the past two months.

Secretary McNamara asked whether the Congressional leaders should be briefed on the Vietnamese situation, linking this briefing to the requirement for military and economic assistance in an amount larger than the Senate is apparently thinking of approving. The President agreed that the leaders should be called in at some point to be told about developments in Vietnam. At the same time, a strong case for higher aid authorization could be made.

The President decided that we should wait until tomorrow to brief the Congressional leaders on Vietnam.

The President then asked what new developments had taken place in the Morocco/Algeria border fighting. Mr. McGeorge Bundy replied that the Moroccans were apparently at fault in the latest incident, but that the truce agreed upon was not effective until tomorrow.

The President asked about the Cubans who had turned up on the Algerian side. Mr. McGeorge Bundy replied that Nasser had been actively trying to get the Cubans out of Algeria lest the Morocco/Algeria fighting become involved in the East-West struggle.

Secretary Rusk and Director McCone said that the Cubans may have gone to Algeria to help Ben Bella with his internal political difficulties. The timing of their arrival made it appear that they had not gone to support the Algerians in their fight against the Moroccans.

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3.4(b)(1)
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(c)

Bromley Smith