

MEMORANDUM OF PRESIDENT FOR THE FILE

The memorandum of Secretary McNamara dated November 1, 1967, attached hereto, raises fundamental questions of policy with reference to the conduct of the war in Vietnam.

I have read it, and studied it, with the utmost care. In addition, I have asked certain advisers to give their written reactions to the memo. These reactions are attached.

I have consulted at length with Ambassador Bunker and General Westmoreland on their recent trip to Washington.

At my suggestion, a group of senior advisers attended a lengthy briefing at the State Department and then met for a full discussion with me.

I have carefully considered the questions presented and the individual views expressed, and I have reached the following conclusions:

With respect to bombing North Vietnam, I would wish for us to:

-- authorize and strike those remaining targets which, after study, we judge to have significant military content but which would not involve excessive civilian casualties; excessive U. S. losses; or substantial increased risk of engaging the USSR or Communist China in the war;

-- maintain on a routine basis a restrike program for major targets throughout North Vietnam;

REF: USJFKCF: Gaudy File 101, E. 127, 1 "W" [McN. 17, 1970, 10] (1).

-- strive to remove the drama and public attention given to our North Vietnamese bombing operations.

I have concluded that, under present circumstances, a unilateral and unrequited bombing stand-down would be read in both Hanoi and the United States as a sign of weakening will. It would encourage the extreme doves; increase the pressure for withdrawal from those who argue "bomb or get out"; decrease support from our most steady friends; and pick up support from only a small group of moderate doves.

I would not, of course, rule out playing our bombing card under circumstances where there is reason for confidence that it would move us towards peace. But with the failure of the Paris track and the opening of BUTTERCUP -- at a time when the North is being bombed -- I do not believe we should move from our present policy unless hard evidence suggests such a change would be profitable.

With respect to operations on the ground, I do not believe we should announce a so called policy of stabilization. An announced change would have, in my judgment, some of the political effects in Hanoi and in the United States of a unilateral bombing stand-down.

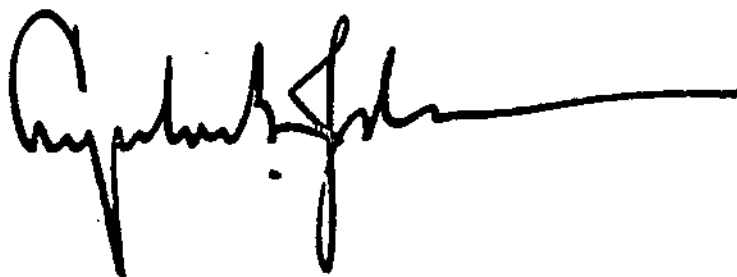
On the other hand, at the moment I see no basis for increasing U. S. forces above the current approved level.

As for the movement of U. S. forces across the frontiers of South Vietnam, I am inclined to be extremely reserved unless a powerful case can be made. There are two reasons: the political risks involved, and

the diversion of forces from pressure on the VC and from all the other dimensions of pacification. But I believe it unwise to announce a policy that would deny us these options.

The third recommendation of Secretary McNamara has merit.

I agree that we should review the conduct of military operations in South Vietnam with a view to reducing U. S. casualties, accelerating the turnover of responsibility to the GVN, and working toward less destruction and fewer casualties in South Vietnam.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Robert McNamara", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned to the right of the date and time.

December 18, 1967

1:40 p.m.