

Memo on conversation with Humphrey
Executive Office Building
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Viet Nam: HHH originally favored the decision to bomb the North in his talks with Johnson, et al. But he is no longer sure he was right. I got the feeling that HHH wanted the bombing stopped, or, at the very least, confined to key military targets such as staging points and materiel depositories. The bombing, he felt, has "poisoned the atmosphere." It has ~~MI~~ hurt the Administration at home with persons who otherwise support our Viet actions and it has given credibility to the North Vietnamese propaganda.

McNamara, with his "computer thinking," knew all along that planes flying at better than 1500 miles an hour would not only hit what they were supposed to.

He further knew that the North Vietnamese live in such a way that peasants' huts abut the railroad tracks. But he never told anyone outside government. Then Salisbury spilled the beans. Johnson should have gone (or should go) on national television and explain our position. The American people want a leader, they like to be rallied, to have a cause. This is not being done and this is the core of the problem.

About a year ago, Humphrey advocated a cordon sanitaire, i.e., placing the American Army and the Marines along the 17th parallel and down the Ho trail to restrict the flow of men and munitions from the North. The Pentagon rejected this idea as too expensive: in the order of \$2-3 billion a year. Now they are doing just that. "What the hell, when you're spending what we're spending out there, what a couple of billion to stop the infiltration, especially when that may help -- really help -- to win the war."

The first phase of Westmoreland's battle strategy was the massive "search and destroy" missions. This came right after the big buildup. They were successful in that the sweeps accomplished what they set out to do, namely to break up the battalion-sized ~~units~~ units of the DRV ~~units~~ and the big staging points. The new phase is called "accelerated pacification." Too early to see whether it will work.

One problem is that the ARVN army is totally unprepared for this sort of work. Perhaps it would be a good idea to put young Americans to work in Viet Nam in lieu of the draft. Humphrey was thinking in terms of a sort of quasi-military civic action program. But the Peace Corps itself must be kept pure and free of this "dirty war."

It is probably too late, in political terms, to stop the bombing without first receiving a quid pro quo from the other side. We are "locked in." U.S. public opinion, the Air Force, the Senate "hawks" -- they would not stand for a pause or a halt without some reciprocity. The best thing now is to pursue quiet diplomacy, try to put together a package in secret that can be sold to the American people. He is waiting it out for the 1968 elections. He thinks perhaps Johnson's policy will be repudiated and the war can end that way. This is the big problem. Meanwhile, though, we should de-escalate, in tiny stages. Change the bombing targets away from centers of civilian population. Give them an indication we're willing to do business without having to lose face. That could work.

(MORE)

Lansdale was back a few days ago and says HHH. He was hopeful that the village elections would ~~begin~~ begin the process of winning the people back. These elections went rather well. The big need now is to elect a civilian government in which the southerners assume control. Ky has come along fast and should be given a role to play, but not the top job. The trouble is that many of the VC are fighting against what they regard as an oppressive military directorate. If a civilian government was elected, many of the VC, Lansdale thinks, would have a good and sufficient reason to stop fighting.

Democratic Politics: Lot of ideas, battle plans floating around, but nothing has been hatched. Thinks it would be a good idea to make O'Brien chairman of the DNC. Lyndon must still be convinced that the DNC are technicians armed with techniques of winning an election and pose no threat to him.

For the first time in my private talks with him since he became Veep, HHH attacked Johnson. He said the President was wrong to have gone to Manila, in advance, telling everyone that nothing would be accomplished. He was wrong to have kept his mouth shut while he was there. Americans want a leader. Then, when he came back and failed to campaign, the press unloaded on him and thought up all the other times that Johnson had buffaloeed them. "I think we lost this election in the last week."

Johnson could lose in '68. If things -- the Negroes, the economy (which is right now shakey), the war and the "confidence" issue -- all happen to go wrong, the Republicans could take it. Our posture should be that we are behind. Johnson should go before the American people, tell them what is on his mind: he should, for example, have had a formal TV report after Manila. The bombing-civilian issue could be defused with such a Presidential address.

Johnson is sending Humphrey to Africa, probably in February. This is off-the-record.

Humphrey ended the interview at 1:30, meeting LBJ for lunch.



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