

Note: I received in this meeting the first "President Johnson tone" for action as contrasted with the "Kennedy tone". Johnson definitely feels that we place too much emphasis on social reforms; he has very little tolerance with our spending so much time being "do-gooders"; and he has no tolerance whatsoever with bickering and quarreling of the type that has gone on in South Vietnam.

The meeting was followed by a statement to the press which was given out by Bundy² to the effect that we would pursue the policies agreed to in Honolulu adopted by the late President Kennedy. A picture was taken of the President with Lodge, McNamara, Rusk and Ball.

² This statement was apparently on a background basis; see the article in *The New York Times*, November 25, but datelined November 24, entitled "Johnson Affirms Aims in Vietnam, Retains Kennedy's Policy of Aiding War on Reds," which cites a "White House Source."

331. National Security Action Memorandum No. 273¹

Washington, November 26, 1963.

TO

The Secretary of State
 The Secretary of Defense
 The Director of Central Intelligence
 The Administrator, AID
 The Director, USIA

¹ Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, NSAM's. Top Secret. NSAM 273 grew out of the discussion at the November 20 Honolulu Conference. McGeorge Bundy wrote the first draft and sent copies to Hilsman and William Bundy, asking for their opinions. In fact, Bundy's draft was almost identical to the final paper. The major exception was paragraph 7 of the Bundy draft which reads as follows: "7. With respect to action against North Vietnam, there should be a detailed plan for the development of additional Government of Vietnam resources, especially for sea-going activity, and such planning should indicate the time and investment necessary to achieve a wholly new level of effectiveness in this field of action. (Action: DOD and CIA)" (Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Vietnam Country Series, Memos and Miscellaneous) Bundy thought that President Kennedy and Lodge might want to discuss this paper during their planned meeting on November 24. Hilsman responded on November 23 in a memorandum to McGeorge Bundy that he thought the draft was "fine" and he had made only minor changes. No record of Hilsman's changes have been found. (*Ibid.*, Hilsman Papers, Country Series—Vietnam) Hilsman also sent a copy to Rusk under cover of a memorandum of November 23 and suggested the Secretary might find it of use at the Cabinet meeting scheduled for that afternoon. (Department of State, Cabinet Meeting Files: Lot 68 D 350) At the November 23 Cabinet meeting, Vietnam was not discussed.

The President has reviewed the discussions of South Vietnam which occurred in Honolulu, and has discussed the matter further with Ambassador Lodge.² He directs that the following guidance be issued to all concerned:

1. It remains the central object of the United States in South Vietnam to assist the people and Government of that country to win their contest against the externally directed and supported Communist conspiracy. The test of all U.S. decisions and actions in this area should be the effectiveness of their contribution to this purpose.

2. The objectives of the United States with respect to the withdrawal of U.S. military personnel remain as stated in the White House statement of October 2, 1963.³

3. It is a major interest of the United States Government that the present provisional government of South Vietnam should be assisted in consolidating itself and in holding and developing increased public support. All U.S. officers should conduct themselves with this objective in view.

4. The President expects that all senior officers of the Government will move energetically to insure the full unity of support for established U.S. policy in South Vietnam. Both in Washington and in the field, it is essential that the Government be unified. It is of particular importance that express or implied criticism of officers of other branches be scrupulously avoided in all contacts with the Vietnamese Government and with the press. More specifically, the President approves the following lines of action developed in the discussions of the Honolulu meeting of November 20. The offices of the Government to which central responsibility is assigned are indicated in each case.

5. We should concentrate our own efforts, and insofar as possible we should persuade the Government of South Vietnam to concentrate its efforts, on the critical situation in the Mekong Delta. This concentration should include not only military but political, economic, social, educational and informational effort. We should seek to turn the tide not only of battle but of belief, and we should seek to increase not only the control of hamlets but the productivity of this area, especially where the proceeds can be held for the advantage of anti-Communist forces.

(Action: The whole country team under the direct supervision of the Ambassador.)

6. Programs of military and economic assistance should be maintained at such levels that their magnitude and effectiveness in the eyes of the Vietnamese Government do not fall below the levels sustained

² See *supra*.

³ See Document 170.

by the United States in the time of the Diem Government. This does not exclude arrangements for economy on the MAP account with respect to accounting for ammunition, or any other readjustments which are possible as between MAP and other U.S. defense resources. Special attention should be given to the expansion of the import, distribution, and effective use of fertilizer for the Delta.

(Action: AID and DOD as appropriate.)

7. Planning should include different levels of possible increased activity, and in each instance there should be estimates of such factors as:

- A. Resulting damage to North Vietnam;
- B. The plausibility of denial;
- C. Possible North Vietnamese retaliation;
- D. Other international reaction.

Plans should be submitted promptly for approval by higher authority.

(Action: State, DOD, and CIA.)

8. With respect to Laos, a plan should be developed and submitted for approval by higher authority for military operations up to a line up to 50 kilometers inside Laos, together with political plans for minimizing the international hazards of such an enterprise. Since it is agreed that operational responsibility for such undertakings should pass from CAS to MACV, this plan should include a redefined method of political guidance for such operations, since their timing and character can have an intimate relation to the fluctuating situation in Laos.

(Action: State, DOD, and CIA.)

9. It was agreed in Honolulu that the situation in Cambodia is of the first importance for South Vietnam, and it is therefore urgent that we should lose no opportunity to exercise a favorable influence upon that country. In particular a plan should be developed using all available evidence and methods of persuasion for showing the Cambodians that the recent charges against us are groundless.

(Action: State.)

10. In connection with paragraphs 7 and 8 above, it is desired that we should develop as strong and persuasive a case as possible to demonstrate to the world the degree to which the Viet Cong is controlled, sustained and supplied from Hanoi, through Laos and other

channels. In short, we need a more contemporary version of the Jordan Report, ⁴ as powerful and complete as possible.

(Action: Department of State with other agencies as necessary.)

McGeorge Bundy

⁴ The Jordan report, entitled "A Threat to the Peace, North Viet-Nam's Effort To Conquer South Viet-Nam," was released by the Department of State on December 8, 1961. For documentation on the preparation and release, see vol. I, pp. 282 ff.

332. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam¹

Washington, November 27, 1963—8:40 p.m.

874. Following highlights from call on Hilsman by Tran Chanh Thanh, Vietnamese Ambassador to Tunisia and special representative to Kennedy funeral ceremonies:

1. Assured Thanh that President Johnson not only supports Kennedy policies toward Viet-Nam, but participated in making them. Will therefore give full support to new government in effective conduct of war.

2. Answering Thanh's query re significance US withdrawal 1,000 men from Viet-Nam,² Hilsman said withdrawal psychologically important in showing success, encouraging Vietnamese people by showing they can increasingly take over job, and deflating Communist propaganda about American objectives in Viet-Nam. To further query re withdrawal American forces by end 1965, Hilsman explained this means only training personnel since Vietnamese expected to be fully trained by then, and we shall keep in Viet-Nam whatever forces are needed for victory. Thanh said there had been erroneous interpretations of withdrawal announcements in Viet-Nam and suggested public clarification along these lines. Hilsman agreed we would find means following through on this suggestion (FYI we expect set up VOA interview with Hilsman), and proposed GVN also clarify matter publicly. GVN chargé Rau (accompanying Thanh) also said that, in SVN

¹ Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 29. Secret. Drafted by Mendenhall and cleared by Hilsman. Repeated to Phnom Penh, Bangkok, Vientiane, London, Paris, and CINCPAC for POLAD.

² See Document 339.