

3/7/89

Dear Harold,

Thanks for your quick response after receiving my letter to THE NATION. I am happy to furnish you with ^{the} material you requested.

I've also enclosed a Robert Healy editorial (he has since retired!) that broke the GLOBE's editorial silence on the matter.

The copy of NSAM 263 is from the J.F.K. Library, which sent me a copy after I requested it following the Healy piece. According to Fletch Prouty NSAM 263 was taken directly from the McNamara/Taylor report (written actually by Prouty and others under Kennedy's direction) upon their return from Vietnam. I don't have a copy of NSAM 273, but this along with 263 are contained in the Gravel Edition of the Pentagon Papers, according to Prouty.

It all smells like a motive for murder to me! No?!

Take care,

Mike

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A missing item at JFK Library

A friend and I recently visited the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum in Dorchester.

Marking the 25th anniversary of President Kennedy's assassination is reason enough to remember him by examining his heroic life. But this is an election year, and for those of us who weren't of age during JFK's presidency, the library tour is a fine way to understand the events surrounding this great man.

An important decision by JFK in the last days of his life, however, is omitted. That is the decision, detailed in National Security Action Memorandum No. 263, dated Oct. 11, 1963, which announced plans for the Vietnamization of the war in Indochina, withdrawing 1,000 US military personnel by Christmas 1963, and to have all of them out by the end of 1965.

Three days after the assassination, President Johnson signed an order reversing this.

Facts like these need to be known by all visitors to the library - students on field trips, Kennedy's contemporaries, and veterans.

MICHAEL CONWAY
Dedham

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET~~ - EYES ONLY

October 11, 1963

NATIONAL SECURITY ACTION MEMORANDUM NO. 263

TO: Secretary of State
Secretary of Defense
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

SUBJECT: South Vietnam

At a meeting on October 5, 1963, the President considered the recommendations contained in the report of Secretary McNamara and General Taylor on their mission to South Vietnam.

The President approved the military recommendations contained in Section I B (1-3) of the report, but directed that no formal announcement be made of the implementation of plans to withdraw 1,000 U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963.

After discussion of the remaining recommendations of the report, the President approved an instruction to Ambassador Lodge which is set forth in State Department telegram No. 534 to Saigon.

McGeorge Bundy
McGeorge Bundy

Copy furnished: cc:
Director of Central Intelligence
Administrator, Agency for International Development

~~TOP SECRET~~ - EYES ONLY

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What JFK would have done in Vietnam

ROBERT HEALY

WASHINGTON - Nothing brings more mail than a column on what might have been in Vietnam had John Kennedy lived and been reelected to a second term. There is also considerable misunderstanding of what was happening there when Kennedy was killed and who sent in the first contingent of troops.

But after my recent column on Kennedy, Charles Daly, director of the John F. Kennedy Library, sent me National Security Action Memorandum No. 263, dated Oct. 11, 1963, labeled top secret, eyes only, which was declassified in 1977. In essence, the memorandum confirms the notion that Kennedy was prepared to wind down the war, put the heat on then-President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam to train his forces to take over the fighting, and begin withdrawing American advisers to ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) units.

Kennedy, in his last press conference, had suggested these actions, but the NSC memo has the force of a presidential order, with

instructions to the secretaries of state and defense and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Kennedy did not send the first US advisers to the ARVN units. When he took over as president in 1961, there were about 2,500 American soldiers operating as advisers. Kennedy increased that number to 16,000.

But by the time of his death, Kennedy had become suspicious of what the generals were requesting and what they could do with what they received.

He sent Robert McNamara, secretary of defense, and Gen. Maxwell Taylor to Vietnam, and at a meeting on Oct. 5, 1963, the president adopted their recommendations.

Their recommendations, contained in the National Security Action memorandum, said that Diem should be informed by the American commanding officer in South Vietnam of "the military changes necessary to complete the military campaign in the northern and central areas . . . by the end of 1964 and in the [Mekong] Delta . . . by the end of 1965."

In order to do this, the memo recommended, "A program be established to train Vietnamese so

that essential functions now performed by the US military personnel can be carried out by the Vietnamese by the end of 1965. It should be possible to withdraw the bulk of US personnel by that time."

It also recommended, "In accordance with the program to take over military functions, the Defense Department should announce in the very near future presently prepared plans to withdraw 1,000 US military personnel by the end of 1963."

There were several recommendations to put the heat on Diem to go along with these proposals.

McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's national security adviser, told McNamara and Dean Rusk, the secretary of state, in a covering memo that the president had approved the report, but had directed that no formal announcement be made of the withdrawal of the 1,000 troops by the end of 1963. Kennedy had anticipated that he would be facing Barry Goldwater, a hawk on Vietnam, in the 1964 election, and he proceeded cautiously on making announcements.

But in his last press confer-

ence, Kennedy spoke of the withdrawal recommendation. "Well, as you know, when Secretary McNamara and Gen. Taylor came back, they announced that we would expect to withdraw a thousand men from South Vietnam before the end of the year, and there has been some reference to that by Gen. Harkins. If we are able to do that, that would be our schedule."

The point is that Kennedy was moving toward the same pattern for settlement as he had followed in Laos, where negotiations had brought about a neutral government and the withdrawal of troops.

For the record: A recent column on the Joseph Kennedy-Chester Atkins contest for the seat on the House Appropriations Committee stated that Rep. Edward Markey had voted on the secret ballot for Atkins. Markey said he voted on the first and second ballot for Kennedy.

Another recent column stated that 1932 was the year of the Calvin Coolidge-Herbert Hoover transition of power. The transition year was 1928-29.

Robert Healy is an associate editor of the Globe.

10/2/63

~~TOP SECRET~~

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6. It is not clear that pressures exerted by the U.S. will move Diem and Nhu toward moderation. Indeed, pressures may increase their obduracy. But unless such pressures are exerted, they are almost certain to continue past patterns of behavior.

B. Recommendations.

We recommend that:

1. General Harkins review with Diem the military changes necessary to complete the military campaign in the Northern and Central areas (I, II, and III Corps) by the end of 1964, and in the Delta (IV Corps) by the end of 1965. This review would consider the need for such changes as:

- a. A further shift of military emphasis and strength to the Delta (IV Corps).
- b. An increase in the military tempo in all corps areas, so that all combat troops are in the field an average of 20 days out of 30 and static missions are ended.
- c. Emphasis on "clear and hold operations" instead of terrain sweeps which have little permanent value.
- d. The expansion of personnel in combat units to full authorized strength.
- e. The training and arming of hamlet militia at an accelerated rate, especially in the Delta.
- f. A consolidation of the strategic hamlet program, especially in the Delta, and action to insure that future strategic hamlets are not built until they can be protected, and until civic action programs can be introduced.

2. A program be established to train Vietnamese so that essential functions now performed by U.S. military personnel can be carried out by Vietnamese by the end of 1965. It should be possible to withdraw the bulk of U.S. personnel by that time.

3. In accordance with the program to train progressively Vietnamese to take over military functions, the Defense Department should announce in the very near future presently prepared plans to withdraw 1000 U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963. This action should be explained in low key as an initial step in a long-term program to replace U.S. personnel with trained Vietnamese without impairment of the war effort.

4. The following actions be taken to impress upon Diem our disapproval of his political program,

a. Continue to withhold commitment of funds in the commodity import program, but avoid a formal announcement. The potential significance of the withholding of commitments for the 1964 military budget should be brought home to the top military officers in working level contacts between USOM and MACV and the Joint General Staff; up to now we have stated \$95 million may be used by the Vietnamese as a planning level for the commodity import program for 1964. Henceforth we could make clear that this is uncertain both because of lack of final appropriation action by the Congress and because of executive policy.

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