

William P. Bundy, Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 3/6/1972
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Biographical Note

Bundy was Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, United States Department of State (1961-1963), Assistant Secretary (1963-1964), and Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (1964-1969). In this interview, he discusses documents from the 1961 National Security Files about Vietnam, including reports about increasing troop strength, questioning Ngo Dinh Diem's ability to lead Vietnam, the use of defoliants and other unconventional weapons, and U.S. counterinsurgency theory, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

Of

William P. Bundy

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William P. Bundy—JFK#2

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Edward G. Lansdale's positions in the Kennedy administration
8	Effects of the Bay of Pigs invasion on Vietnam policy
11	State and Defense Department Vietnam task forces
17	Laos
20, 43	Increasing U.S. troop levels in Vietnam
22	Discussions about treaties with Ngo Dinh Diem
24	Use of defoliants and other unconventional weapons in Vietnam
30	Replacing Lionel C. McGarr as Vietnam MAAG (military assistance advisory group) commander
39, 53, 82	Diem's requests for aid, and U.S. doubts about his ability to govern Vietnam
41	Robert H. Johnson's memos about Vietnam
45	Robert K.G. Thompson's report about Vietnam
46	Mike Mansfield's memos about Vietnam
48	Bombing North Vietnam
49, 56	William Averell Harriman's negotiations with the Soviet Union on Laos and attempts to negotiate with them about Vietnam
54	Joint State-Defense Department memo about Vietnam
61	"Thanksgiving Day massacre" Kennedy administration personnel changes
68	U.S. counterinsurgency theory
77	Failure to train U.S. personnel to speak Vietnamese
86	International Control Commission
88	U.S. military command structure in Vietnam
90	Vietnam in 1962

Second of Three Oral History Interviews

with

William P. Bundy

Federal Records Center, Waltham, Massachusetts
March 6, 1972

By William W. Moss

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MOSS: Let me ask you as an opening why Lansdale [Edward G. Lansdale] was not used. I do have a very early document here and some supplementary ones. There's a report from Walt Rostow [Walt Whitman Rostow] to your brother, McGeorge Bundy, on a meeting that took place on the 28th of January, which evidently was the first dealing with the whole problem in the White House, at which Lansdale submitted a report or a report from Lansdale was discussed. Towards the end there the President [John F. Kennedy] was reported to remark, "Well, who's to be our ambassador to Vietnam? Lansdale or Young [Kenneth T. Young]?"¹ And Lansdale crops up again and again in the next few months as to—the thought is that he should play some significant role, but where. Evidently by March, Nolting [Frederick E. Nolting, Jr.] has been decided upon as the man, because there's a memo from Clifton [Chester V. Clifton, Jr.] trying to speed up his departure from Paris, which comes a little later.² And there is another memo from Rostow to the President this time in which he is talking about Lansdale.³ Evidently as late as April sometime the question of Lansdale as ambassador still is open in somebody's mind.

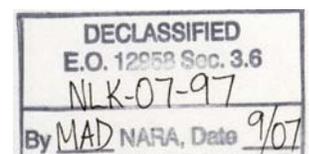
¹ NSF: CO: Vietnam Vol. 1, 1-3/61: Box 193

01/30/61 WH TS(...) 4pp; W.W. Rostow memo to McG. Bundy: "Meeting Saturday Morning, January 28, in the President's Office, on Vietnam"

² Ibid.

03/14/61 WH U 1p; McG. Bundy memo to L.D. Battle re attached [Memo from C.V. Clifton]

³ Ibid.



[-1 -]

BUNDY: That's fascinating. Well, I don't have any direct knowledge of it. Lansdale was working at the time in the Pentagon, working in charge of liason with the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and reporting directly to Gilpatric [Roswell L. Gilpatric], as I recall. I don't remember whether I ever saw his original report. I myself wasn't drawn into Vietnam at least until April with any great closeness at all, although my office handled the military inputs of what was then called the counterinsurgency plans. So that I don't have any contemporary light on that. I could only speculate that Lansdale was so much the operator that I would think a lot of people might have hesitated about whether he'd be a good number one, coordinating other people and directing an integrated effort. He had always been the wild card and not the straight card.

MOSS: All right. Well, that's interesting because here is the Rostow comment of, what is it, 15 April.⁴

BUNDY: This is Rostow saying it ought to be...

MOSS: It ought to be Nolting instead of...

BUNDY: ...Nolting and not Lansdale. I don't know what—and Walt was very much concerned with Vietnam in that early period. The man who, as time went on, clearly developed a feeling that Lansdale just

[-2 -]

couldn't play on a team in a useful way was McNamara [Robert S. McNamara]. But I would think that was probably later. What happened was that in the spring of '61 Lansdale was put briefly in charge of this task force. Then that was moved over to the State Department under Cottrell [Sterling J. Cottrell]. Then in the summer—and this, of course, after the Bay of Pigs—Lansdale was put in personal charge of efforts to stir up trouble in Cuba or to keep the underground alive, if there was one. I never knew the details of that. So he was shifted off that then. Then he reappears in the story, of course, as a member of the Taylor-Rostow [Maxwell D. Taylor] team in the fall and writes a script for a form of partnership that would have been...

MOSS: Oh, I didn't know that he wrote that script.

BUNDY: I'm assuming he wrote that. I assume he wrote the script for the general idea that men should get very close to their Vietnamese counterparts and

03/29/61 WH C(...) 1p; W.W. Rostow memo to JFK proposing actions on Vietnam

⁴ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. I, 4/61: Box 193

04/15/61 WH S(...) 2pp; W.W. Rostow memo to JFK: "Durbrow on Alsop on Diem on Vietnam"

work so closely with them that they would have a kind of special, osmotic influence and sympathy.

MOSS: The only place I see that in the files is in two things. One is the joint State Defense recommendations to the President, and secondly the actual instructions going out to Nolting.

[-3-]

BUNDY: Well, I may be wrong on this, but I think when I saw the whole of the Taylor report, including the annexes, there was one annex that had a particular emphasis on how you deal with Diem [Ngo Dinh Diem], how you work with Diem.

MOSS: Yes. Yes. And that was a Lansdale product?

BUNDY: I may have presumed that Lansdale wrote it because it just seemed absolutely up his alley. This would have been the area where he was expert, this would have been the area where I think at this stage Taylor and Rostow would have tended to defer to him. He knew Diem better than anybody else, including Nolting. He'd been through harder times with Diem and all of that. So I thought he had an influence in drawing up that concept of going about it: You get him to do the things you want by becoming just 200 percent with him. Now that was the concept that I interpret the Taylor report as having urged as opposed to the bargaining quid pro quo concept that Nolting was instructed to apply as a result of the final outcome of that decision.

MOSS: That's interesting because Nolting seems to have bought the former rather than the latter.

BUNDY: He preferred the "work very closely with them and show

[-4-]

yourself to be thoroughly and utterly sympathetic then he'll trust you and take your advice." Obviously, Lansdale had in mind his own experience in the Philippines particularly, which he's now so vividly described in this new book that's just been published of—remarkable story of how he got terribly close to Magsaysay [Ramon Magsaysay] and got him to do him the things that were good for Magsaysay, also from the standpoint of U.S. policy. Well, this is getting a little far afield on Lansdale, but that was the role he played. And then he drops out of sight after that. And I have a very distinct feeling in the back of my mind that somewhere along in November or December of 1961 the question arose whether he could be of any use as part of this effort to get Diem to play. And I think it was particularly McNamara who would have said, "I don't really think this is a good move," because McNamara sat on having him go to Vietnam and stayed sat for a long, long while.

Really, it took a direct Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.]-to-the-President in the Johnson [Lyndon Baines Johnson] period. But that's getting beyond me.

MOSS: Yes. I can see how it would have been a difficult thing to accomplish if you were already moving on a military man for the MACV [military assistance command, Vietnam] concept and you already had your ambassador

[-5-]

on the site. You throw Lansdale in and this is a pretty high-powered wildcard to saddle your people in Saigon with.

BUNDY: That's true. Now, I don't know that Nolting would have minded necessarily, but it was a situation that was more monolithic. You had to deal with Diem and you had to deal with Nhu [Ngo Dinh Nhu] and no more than a certain number of people could deal with them. I suppose that isn't fundamentally different from what it had been in '54-'55. But then Diem had been so much more shaky that we were supporting him every which way.

MOSS: Let me come back to the appointment business. You mentioned that McNamara later came to feel that Lansdale was not the man. We've had it said to us but never pinned down that somebody in the Pentagon was against him in this early period as a question of appointment on the...

BUNDY: It could well be. I don't recall that at this stage, McNamara or Gilpatric or Nitze [Paul Henry Nitze] or myself, four who might have said this—just four but the ones I knew—had any feelings against Lansdale. I had always been one of his rooters in fact and pretty much remained so and was very enthusiastic in support when he finally went out in '65. But I don't know who that could have been. Although it sounds to me

[-6-]

inherently quite plausible. Lansdale was an operator. He was an operator in the Pentagon. I had great difficulty getting papers from him. I was Gilpatric's backup man on meetings of the committee that dealt with covert actions so that when Gilpatric was busy or out of town I had to go to the meetings. Well, in the normal course, I thought that meant that Lansdale better keep me posted on what was going on because I might have to step into the lineup at any time. Well, this was the greatest effort and constant riding to get him to bring the papers down and tell me what was going on. He was inherently secretive. You always felt he had three more angles he was playing. Now, having been in the agency at a distance from him and knowing what he had accomplished and having the most enormous admiration for him, this didn't particularly bother me. But I can see how if he did that even once to some other people this would queer him to some extent anyway.

MOSS: Let me turn to the counterinsurgency plan. It was really a holdover from the Eisenhower administration [Dwight D. Eisenhower], wasn't it?

BUNDY: That was a straight holdover. It was not rethought. It seemed to make sense in a limited action sort of a way, and it was backed on that basis. I don't recall any fuss about that one.

[-7 -]

MOSS: Then in March, I believe it is, we have McNamara giving Gilpatric the assignment of working up a plan of action. That's the McNamara memo to the President saying that he has done this and the next sheet following is the instructions to Gilpatric.⁵

BUNDY: Yes. Now, that, of course, is inseparable from its place in the Bay of Pigs week.

MOSS: All right. Now tell me about that.

BUNDY: Well, let's see. The 20th of April—check your calendar—would have been roughly the Thursday of Bay of Pigs week. Let's pause for a moment and get that. [Interruption]

MOSS: The date, again, is April the 20th, which is a Thursday, yes.

BUNDY: That would be Thursday, the 20th. And, you see, the invasion had been launched on Sunday night and had become disastrous by Tuesday, and the shockwave was just everywhere. And I don't what discussions contributed to this particular decision, but I think it's simply as if you'd lit a match to a smoldering pile of newspaper. Everybody thought Vietnam was quite serious, that we hadn't yet managed to get hold of it, that we just weren't on top of things. There was the most immense sense that you had to

[-8 -]

have intense looks and direct responsibility for any crisis or you'd get the diffusion of judgment and responsibility which everybody at once saw had been a part, at any rate, of the debacle in the Bay of Pigs. So whether it was just, "This is a top priority problem we haven't got hold of," or whether it was also to some degree, "We've lost a round, a bad round, in this intense conflict with the communist side and we've simply got to make sure that we're

⁵ Ibid.

04/20/61 Defense TS(...) 1p SecDef Cont. No. TS-383; R.S. McNamara memo to JFK re preparation of programs and plans for Vietnam, Cuba and U.S. conventional military forces (with attached memo from McNamara to Gilpatric)

holding elsewhere.” Whether there was a desire to stand doubly firm in Vietnam, I think some of that can certainly be traced in the following month. I’m merely not able to say whether it was why this happened to be triggered on April 20th.

MOSS: It certainly could account for the strength of the Johnson statements in Vietnam a little later.

BUNDY: Oh, yes. Now there’s an interesting aspect to that. I’ve been told this by Foreign Service officers who were with him. My source for this is another man, and I guess there’s no

[-9-]

harm in that. But the story of the Johnson report is an interesting one. He was accompanied on the trip by two Foreign Service officers, Frank Meloy [Francis Edward Meloy] and Edwin Martin [Edwin M. Martin]. And Martin is the one who told me this. He’s the man who’s most recently been our ambassador in Burma, I think, and before that counsel general to U Thant. But Martin said that this draft was worked up by professional staff and that another member of the party who contributed very heavily to it is the man who’s been Mike Mansfield’s man on the Democratic Policy Committee over all these years, who’s been on all Mike’s trips and so on.

MOSS: I don’t believe I know the name, unless this can be picked up.

BUNDY: He went with LBJ. He appears on all those Mansfield reports as the secretary of the subcommittee and has been a very senior man in the Senate policy structure. But he went with it and they all wrote it together. And Johnson and Horace Busby, a very favorite Johnson speechwriter and very close colleague

[-10-]

and a man of considerable literary style and good judgment too, they beefed it up somewhat. But that this was very much a consensus paper. It was the professionals and it was this fellow from Mansfield’s shop, and they all worked together on it. And Johnson only increased the force of it by a small amount, as Martin tells it.

MOSS: The only names I have here are Carl Marcy [Carl M. Marcy] and Darrell St. Claire, who’s a clerk.

BUNDY: No, I’m not talking about the Senate Foreign Relations Committee but the Democratic Policy Committee.

MOSS: Okay. Now, just beyond that I think I have two alternative organizational arrangements for the task force that is eventually set up under Cottrell.

And in one of them it set up under Alexis Johnson [U. Alexis Johnson] and the other one set up under Rostow, so you have a different institutional focus for the thing.⁶

BUNDY: I don't remember that at all.

MOSS: Do you remember how it came out eventually

[-11-]

that...

BUNDY: Well, it eventually went under the State Department, and at a lower level than Alex Johnson because it came out as the Cottrell task force.

MOSS: Right, under Cottrell. Okay. Now, first of all, why did this go to McNamara and Gilpatric to begin with for the overview?

BUNDY: I just don't recall. I think it was a reflection that McNamara must have come up with the suggestion this be done and was so much the "can do" man, as he was so often, not really intending to take it over from another department, but "I have the men; I can turn this thing out in a week," and by implication others will take a lot of time and turn out something pretty fuzzy—which was often true. The State Department was in a bad state of repair; Alex Johnson had only just come back from Bangkok; you had nobody really running things in the State Department. There's some very good passages in Chester Bowles's [Chester B. Bowles] memoirs that tell his impressions and his lack of a second man—well, Chet wasn't even a first man when it came to executive work—but there

[-12-]

wasn't a second man until Johnson came. So that I think it was just that at this stage the State Department was still getting reorganized and McNamara, whose whole team had been aboard before January 20th so that by then they were shaken down and taut and very intense and hard-working with good staffs, could do the job much better.

MOSS: And then you do have it set up under Cottrell, and I think that—where is it?—here a little bit I have a list of the staff members. Oh, there it is. Yes, this is the list of the staff members. Oh, there it is. Yes, this is the list of the staff members. I notice that Haydn Williams was the man designated and Luther Heinz [Luther C. Heinz] was his alternate. I suppose Heinz went most of the time.

⁶ Ibid.

../../ State C(...) 3pp; Table: Composition of Task Force on Vietnam

BUNDY: Right. Heinz did most of the time. Heinz was a very capable officer. I guess Haydn Williams stayed on through '61 in the office, I've forgotten. He was not a man of great force. Heinz, on the other hand, was an extremely capable and effective officer.

[-13-]

MOSS: I get the impression that once the Cottrell task force was set up, it really didn't do much except report on things that were happening, that it had very little input.

BUNDY: That is right. It did very little creative input. Now, as I recall, on July first or thereabouts—and I think this was 1961—it was replaced by a task force Southeast Asia under Alexis Johnson. So that during the summer months the papers that I've seen carry the imprint of the Alexis Johnson task force.

MOSS: Oh, now I haven't seen this. I'll have to check through and see if I can find that.

BUNDY: Now, there may have been a working group still on Vietnam under Cottrell. But when you come to the October period and you look at the various ideas that were churning around, there is at least one from the task force Southeast Asia which is under Alexis Johnson.

MOSS: See. There's one point—I don't know if

[-14-]

I have it there or not—in which Cottrell himself comes through with a.... Let's go this way a bit. That's the plan for action that comes up. We'll get to that in a minute. I guess it's in the next folder that I get to the Cottrell thing. So let's look at this first. This is a Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] commentary on the plan for action that came out of the Gilpatric task force.⁷ I wonder if you'd just sort of look it over quickly and comment on it.

BUNDY: This is Mr. Sorensen's?

MOSS: Right. This is Sorensen's. He says he concurs with, I guess, with McGeorge Bundy and Dave Bell [David E. Bell]. [Interruption]

BUNDY: Very good. I don't have any knowledge of it. I remember it as being a very intensely argued thing. The feeling was that this report was over

⁷ Ibid.

04/28/61 WH U 1p; Theodore Sorensen memo to JFK: "Plan for Vietnam"

schematic, over planned, over precise, so that it better be given a little more realism. I just don't recall that whole month very well, to be honest.

[-15-]

MOSS: Well, the next thing that I have tagged there, which is under your right thumb at the moment, I believe, is a cable from Harriman [William Averell Harriman] after a talk with Diem.⁸ If you'd sort of look that over for a moment...

BUNDY: May 4th. [Interruption] Well, I don't recall this particular one, but... I just don't happen to recall it.

MOSS: I find it interesting simply because it's the first Harriman input really that I find in the files.

BUNDY: Yes, it's a Harriman input on Vietnam; those were very rare. Of course, he was overwhelmingly on Laos in this period. He became engaged in Laos in mid-March when that New Delhi meeting with Souvanna [Souvanna Phouma].... And all through you'll find very few Harriman inputs on Vietnam, I think.

MOSS: Well, until... I have one a little later. I can't put my finger on it at the moment, but there is one in which he comes out rather clearly

[-16-]

and consistently with his later stand, too. It may be some time in late '61 or early '62. Let's see. I think the next item that I have here is a Rostow comment on the plan for action.⁹ [Interruption]

BUNDY: I don't remember this one either. It shows a very statesmanlike reserve, I would say on that. It shows that Walt was feeling his way like all the rest of us.

MOSS: Now, the Cottrell item comes a little later here in which he argues very definitely for an all-out effort in Southeast Asia as opposed to—this is the one here—the plan for action and the Vietnam focus and so on. He calls for a...

BUNDY: Who is this talking now?

⁸ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. I, 5/61: Box 193
05/04/61 State TS(...) 2pp Embtel 1973 (Bangkok); W.A. Harriman report on conversations with Diem

⁹ Ibid.

05/10/61 WH S(...) 2pp; W.W. Rostow memo to JFK: "The Vietnam NSC Paper"

MOSS: This is Cottrell, who evidently on his own because he had a real thing in his craw about the whole business, calls for securing the Laos panhandle in order to save Vietnam and a number of other things.¹⁰

BUNDY: I don't recall that one either. Cottrell later became somewhat skeptical, I think, but at this

[-17-]

stage he may have been all-out. I just don't recall. A great many of the career service officers—and Cottrell had served in Honolulu with Admiral Felt [Harry D. Felt]—felt very strongly in what might be called a military direction. That's not in derogation of them, but they saw the problem as a whole and thought you had to hold at all fronts. So the decision to negotiate in Laos struck them as a dangerous compromise. I'm sure that somebody like Steeves [John M. Steeves] felt this way. And this suggests very strongly that Cottrell did because he urges breaking off the Geneva conference and cleaning up Laos militarily. But I don't know...

MOSS: I was wondering.... You don't remember that reaching your area for comment or anything of that sort?

BUNDY: No. Well, I don't remember. It undoubtedly would have because the thirty-five copies, it certainly would have gone over to us. But I don't remember any fuss about it because certainly

[-18-]

in the early summer—and this was June 19th and I see this was labeled a draft too, but still—all through the summer of '61 it became more and more clear we're going to negotiate Laos and we're not going to fight it.

MOSS: Well, this in effect is what Bob Johnson [Robert H. Johnson] says in this covering memo on the thing. He points out the decisions have really already been made and Cottrell is reopening the case in effect. But I was wondering how much this sort of struck in people's craw all the way through, do you think?

BUNDY: Oh, the Laos thing stuck in the craws of a number of people. A very considerable number of the military men in the Pentagon, civilians in the Pentagon, were convinced to a man as far as I could tell. Possibly a holdover like Haydn Williams wasn't—I'm not clear—but he wasn't a man of real importance. But in the military men in the Pentagon and in the old line—well, not old line but the holdover

¹⁰ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol.I(a), 6/61: Box 193
06/19/61 State S(...) 9pp; Draft report of the Task Force on Vietnam on the question of a Laos settlement and its implications for Vietnam

[-19-]

Foreign Service officers who played a part in the very strong Laos policy of the last months of the Eisenhower administration, they thought this was terribly risky business. Now, they weren't at all clear how you'd do if you started to fight in Laos, but they thought this was just going out the easy way.

MOSS: Now, a little earlier in the file, deeper in the lower portion of the file, there is a letter from Diem in which he asks for an additional hundred thousand troop level to bring him up to two hundred and seventy thousand.¹¹

BUNDY: Right.

MOSS: There was great worry as to whether, one, he could manage it, and just how much we were going to have to underwrite this and whether we wanted to or not and this sort of thing. This sounds to me like it might have been in your area for evaluation and such.

BUNDY: I think we were, and I think we were inclined to think this did make sense, but I haven't looked at the papers on it.

[-20-]

MOSS: What we did was to sort of underwrite an initial increment of thirty thousand above what he had already and say that it would take him a year or so to get that anyway so we might as well wait a bit.

BUNDY: Right. I think we finally got to the two hundred and seventy thousand sometime in mid-'62 or something of that sort. It, in fact, took quite a long while to play out. And, I don't know, I always assumed those early Diem requests were targets. I didn't think he was fooling, but I thought they were clearly long-range things.

MOSS: And you have, related to that in a way, the development of the Staley [Eugene A. Staley] mission and whether or not the finances of South Vietnam were in such shape that, one, we could really work together, and, two, they could underwrite the kinds of effort that were going to be needed. And this, of course, gets over into the MAP [Military assistance program] area. I wondered if you had thoughts on that at the time.

¹¹ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. I(a), 6/61: Box 193
06/09/61 Vietnam S(...) 7pp; Ngo Dinh Diem letter to JFK [See also 06/09/61 WH S(...) 2pp; M.D. Taylor memo to JFK: "Reply to Diem's Request for a 100,000 Man Increase in the Army of Vietnam" (found under 06/29/61)]

[-21-]

BUNDY: Well, I don't recall the Staley report¹² nearly as well as I should on a firsthand basis. I have read it in the State Department files. It's a very competent piece of paper and it covered in a balanced way the economic side—the costs and all the rest—and I don't remember where it came out. It hung fire for quite a while when it came in in July. Everybody said, "This is a good thing," and a few pieces of it were adopted. But most of it hung fire and really didn't get put in until the following January after you'd had all the....

MOSS: Right. It wasn't even accepted in principle by Diem until September, I think, of '61.

BUNDY: That's right. That's right.

MOSS: Okay. We have, in the summer, developing VC [Viet Cong] activity that begins to worry people a great deal. And then after that, you have a request from Diem—now let me see if I can find that one—for a mutual defense treaty. Let's see if I can locate that one. It's some-

[-22-]

where along about September, I believe it is.¹³

BUNDY: Yes, there was something of that sort, and I don't recall exactly.

MOSS: But this seemed to be interesting in two aspects: One, it's an invitation or it seems to support an invitation for increased U.S. involvement, and the same time it raises the question of sovereignty that seemed to bug Diem. You have him wanting a bilateral defense treaty between equals rather than this sort of protectorate relationship that he was worried about. Now, I don't know whether this is because it's seen through Nolting's eyes or what.

BUNDY: I don't have much light to throw on that. I rather think it was pursued during the Taylor visit and some line of argument was used that tried to get him to drop the idea because we were interpreting the SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] treaty. This is an important point. All along we were interpreting the SEATO treaty as involving a very definite

[-23-]

¹² NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. I(a), 7/61: Box 193
07/22/61 State S(...) 24pp; Joint Action Program Proposed by the Vietnam-United States Special Financial Groups

¹³ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. I(c), 10/1-15/61: Box 194
10/01/61 State S(...) 2pp Embtel 421 (Saigon); Reports discussion between Diem, Felt, McGarr, and Nolting

obligation on their request just as if it were a bilateral for practical purposes. In March of 1961 we privately assured the Thai that we took this position, and we were to go public in the same way in the Rusk-Thanat [Dean Rusk; Thanat Khoman] communiqué of March '62.

MOSS: Right.

BUNDY: Well, I'm just guessing that it would have been sidetracked. At any rate, I don't recall it being at all an active thing in the October-November period.

MOSS: Okay. Let me ask you about this one out of—unless there's anything else you see there that you're particularly interested in.

BUNDY: No.

MOSS: This is off on another tangent a bit, but it does come sequentially in the file, and this is a paper out of ARPA [Advanced Research Projects Agency] on use of esoteric weapons and things.¹⁴ You begin to get the first

[-24-]

defoliant business here. I was wondering if I could get a comment on the whole business of viewing Vietnam—I guess in the press view and in the New Left view—as sort of a playground for new weapons and how much of an impetus there was for, “Well, we've got these things in our pocket; we've got to see whether or not they work. He's a place.” What kind of judgments were involved in this? Were they good ones? Were they well thought out or what?

BUNDY: Well, I see the man's name that was associated with a good deal of this, and that's a fellow named Godel [William H. Godel]. Godel was very much an operator. He was a friend of others in the Pentagon who were operators. He had a rather legendary reputation for effectiveness in some situation overseas. I've forgotten, I don't think it was in association with Lansdale, but at any rate, he'd worked.... Oh, I think he may have been associated with General Donovan [William J. Donovan] or something, I don't know. It was some association of that

[-25-]

sort. He was with this combat development business and was working very hard on special gimmicks of various sorts. I find it hard to divorce my memory of him from the fact that he was subsequently convicted of fraud in paychecks and was then sent to the jug—so that one's

¹⁴ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. I(b), 9/61: Box 194
09/13/61 Defense S(4) 4pp SP61-100; ARPA Progress Report: “Vietnam Combat Development and Test Center”

memory gets a little clouded after a thing like that. I thought he was a pushy, self-promoting guy. I never took his judgment without checking it against somebody else, with somebody else. And I just thought he was doing.... But I did think that this time that he was just doing a very aggressive job in what he was assigned to do.

Now, on the broader question of using something to try it out, I think there was an element of that in types of equipment that didn't really carry any different connotation than other types of equipment, that is, trying to use older, slower, more maintainable types of aircraft to do the same thing that you'd use aircraft to do, that raised no question.

[-26-]

If you find a neater way to do it, fine, by all means.

Now, the defoliant thing was always in a different category. I can't remember a time when the defoliant thing wasn't argued quite extensively, from the very first time. My impression is that Kennedy first authorized its use along about the fall of 1961.

MOSS: I believe that's...

BUNDY: I think that's right. And this was to clear rights-of-way.

MOSS: There's also a speculative use of it in the mountain areas for rice crops and manioc root and that kind of thing.

BUNDY: I think that probably was mentioned at that time, but that wasn't done until spring of '62 or something of that sort.

MOSS: Right, right. At this point the MAAG [military assistance advisory group] and the Vietnamese are simply pushing for the supplies and the training in this kind of thing, I believe, if I recall it correctly. And afterwards the defoliant of right-of-way is fairly

[-27-]

broadly delegated but is still held by MACV and the ambassador. The crop destruction part later on in '62, I believe it's August, has to be approved each time by the White House directly because they have to come back to the White House for it each time.

BUNDY: Yes. My impression is that any change of concept or any enlargement was very much subject to argument. I remember a great deal of discussion, but on the whole the civilians both in the Pentagon and in the State Department wondering whether you got enough for it to warrant the impression. We realized—or at least we were told and assured—that the stuff was inherently no more harmful than what was sprayed along every railroad right-of-way in America. But nonetheless, you did realize that it had a psychological impact that the peasant could react against it or think something was being destroyed. The next thing that happened to his

[-28-]

other crops for other reasons would be attributed to this. You were always running into negatives. And this was very much argued. I think Averell Harriman was among the most sensitive about it, but almost all the civilians queried it, wanted to be shown all the way along.

MOSS: Yes. I find very mixed views. There are people who very definitely want to use it and there are others who say it simply isn't worth the effort. And later you get Hanoi making a complaint to the ICC [International Control Commission] on the use of noxious chemicals in the south and this being played up in *Pravda*, (I think that note is from another thing) and the effort that we had to go through to sort of counter this whole business: finding out what kinds of herbicides were used in the Soviet Union, how regularly, and so on, to counteract that whole business. But I do think it was fairly well controlled from the papers. What is the next item I have?

BUNDY: The next item is the Robert Levy report of September 20.¹⁵

[-29-]

MOSS: I think I simply tagged that because it seemed to be generally up your alley and a fairly clear report of the situation.

BUNDY: Yes. This speaks of the Vietnam task force. That would suggest Cottrell did have a separate group. [Interruption] Yes. I don't recall any more than that.

MOSS: And the next one?

BUNDY: The next one you've got marked is the memorandum from Cottrell to Alexis Johnson, September 29th. Napalm. Defoliants.¹⁶

MOSS: Oh, I think I simply marked that out of curiosity. I don't think there's a great deal to say on it.

BUNDY: Isn't that interesting. That's the Armalite rifles.

MOSS: Yes.

¹⁵ Ibid.

09/22/61 WH S(...) 3pp; R.H. Johnson memo to W.W. Rostow: "Meeting of the Vietnam Task Force, Wednesday, September 20, 1961"

¹⁶ Ibid.

09/29/61 State TS(...) 3pp; S.J. Cottrell memo to U.A. Johnson: "Questions you May Wish to Explore with Defense in Discussing the Limited Holding Actions in Southeast Asia."

BUNDY: There's a recommendation referring to possible weaknesses in General McGarr [Lionel C. McGarr].

MOSS: Yes. Now, that's the reason I had that one marked. I wondered how early it was felt that

[-30-]

McGarr was going to have to be replaced. How does this enter into it?

BUNDY: Well, I can tell you a little about McGarr's replacement. Through the fall, Admiral Heinz used to bring me—and I think he did it deliberately and conscientiously—copies of the material that was being sent back from Saigon which included...

MOSS: Situation reports and that kind of things?

BUNDY: Yes, all sorts of things. Included the letters that McGarr had taken to writing Diem. These were most extraordinary letters; they were hectoring letters. It was as though Diem was a junior officer in the command and general staff school getting a critique of what he was doing. "You're doing this all wrong. You've got to do this, do that, do the other." They had a very strong hectoring, teacher aspect to them with no softening or gestures toward the ego of the man he was addressing. And they startled me. I didn't know much about

[-31-]

dealing with Asians, but these seemed to me the work of a man who had just thrown sensitivity to the winds.

MOSS: That's funny because I've had none of this from the Nolting end. I wonder if he was aware of them.

BUNDY: Well, maybe Nolting didn't know about these, I don't know.

MOSS: Because that could have made things very difficult.

BUNDY: Well, it might have, you'd think, but he poured his letters in. So that implanted a seed of doubt in my mind. Now, it may well be that Cottrell and others who apparently had this doubt—as this memorandum reflects—also shared it. So there was a doubt about McGarr: Is McGarr the right fellow? Is he too blunt, too old, 3rd Infantry Division under Lucien Truscott, which is where he cut his teeth? Is he just altogether the wrong man for this show? And when we went to Honolulu

[-32-]

in December 16th for that conference, which had a great deal to do with shaping up the program and assessing the people and all that flowed at you very hard in the course of that day's meeting. Why, one of the early presentations was given by McGarr, and it was a plan to take Zone "D" by massive thrust by Vietnamese forces from all sides, pour through it. One didn't know a great deal about the terrain or the capabilities of the Vietnamese, but you just sensed right away this is just planning gone nuts. It doesn't make any sense at all and so on. And what I remember most vividly is sitting at the table next to McNamara and passing him a note saying, "If this is the quality of our leadership, we'd better fold our tents now." And he handed it back to me and said, "Tear that up." [Laughter] I got the impression that he formed his opinion right there and at that moment of time, that any man who could

[-33-]

even put together, let alone present with feeling, a plan as asinine as the one that was being presented to us, just had to be replaced as quickly as you could do it. And it was literally within a day after his return—and I remember the week before Christmas we looked very hard at folders on senior military officers. Already the two that were really being thought of were Westmoreland [William C. Westmoreland] and Harkins [Paul D. Harkins]. As I recall, I think I saw a memorandum on the subject. McNamara turned to Max Taylor and asked him his judgment. Taylor endorsed Harkins rather forcefully, and Harkins was the name who went forward. Westmoreland was then the commandant at West Point, but he was the second man taken seriously at that time. But everybody agreed McGarr had to go. Then, for a time, there was a face-saving thing. I think the Joint Chiefs came in and wanted to avoid an outright relief.

[-34-]

MOSS: And medical treatment or something of this sort.

BUNDY: Well, later on that came in. But McGarr was going to be kept as chief of MAAG and this was a new title and this saved his faces and he kept his three stars, and all that. I went out in early February with one of my chief missions being to see whether this was all right. I saw McGarr and tried to be as conciliatory as possible, but I had the feeling that he already knew that this was it, for practical purposes he'd been relieved. And then he developed very shortly thereafter the heart pains that caused him to come back for medical reasons, and that was the end of the line for him. It was sad. He was a very fine, crusty, old style soldier, the kind who may have done wonderful things in World War II. But he simply had *no* comprehension, as we saw it, of the psychology of the people he was dealing with or anything else. I think that was a straight McNamara decision made at that moment of time practically,

[-35-]

in Honolulu, probably with a good many doubts already existing.

MOSS: Already existing.

BUNDY: But I had the feeling—McGarr was one of the club later to be known or perhaps then known among all junior officers as “the dinosaurs,” the men who all served together at reasonably senior levels in World War II and who stuck up for each other through thick and thin. It wasn’t until you got General Decker [George H. Decker] relieved by General Wheeler [Earle G. Wheeler], fall of ’62...

MOSS: Yes, approximately.

BUNDY: But, at any rate, this was that crowd of men. They were wonderful men, but they also defended each other through thick and thin and regardless of fitness for a particular job.

MOSS: Okay. What’s next on the list there?

BUNDY: Bilateral treaty, which I didn’t know about.

MOSS: Yes. Okay.

BUNDY: Let’s look at this one.

MOSS: That’s another defoliant thing.

BUNDY: That—we’ve covered one.

MOSS: I think we’ve

[-36-]

covered that fairly well unless you see something there.

BUNDY: No, I don’t know. This was.... I remember the discussion; it sort of overlapped with the policy business. And this is all indications of the Taylor-Rostow visit which we’ve discussed. I see you marked here an incoming Admiral Felt.

MOSS: Oh, yes, in which he comes out on balance for not introducing U.S. forces into Vietnam.¹⁷

¹⁷ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. I(c), 10/16-31/61: Box 194
10/20/61 Defense TS(2) 3pp CINCPAC 200401Z0CT61; Pros and cons of introducing U.S. combat forces into South Vietnam

BUNDY: Oh, yes. Now, that's very striking. I wasn't aware of that, I wasn't aware of that message, and I think it may have been a significant element in the...

MOSS: In the later evaluation of the Taylor recommendation?

BUNDY: Now, wait a second. Time of receipt: this is all October. And I see an oral note saying Admiral Felt's view was different on the second of November and that he orally supported the force. I think—if this is October 20, I don't see much in it one way or the other.

MOSS: Okay.

BUNDY: Because that was before the heat really built.

[-37-]

Now, the intervention concept paper, I've seen that. What date is that? Is that an annex to the Taylor paper?¹⁸

MOSS: I think it's a follow on, if I'm not mistaken.

BUNDY: I think this paper is all part of the October review.

MOSS: Okay.

BUNDY: I don't think this is post-Taylor. I may be wrong, but unless there is some other evidence all of this ten and forty thousand figures were all figures that were in the October papers. And the SEATO force idea and all that was October business superseded by the Taylor-Rostow report.

MOSS: Okay. As a lead-in then perhaps to the Taylor-Rostow report, let's shift to.... Well, let's make sure there's nothing more there for a minute.

BUNDY: I'm looking at Rostow memorandum of October fifth indicating that the President was seeing Harriman on Laos¹⁹, which indicates the counterpoint of the whole

[-38-]

¹⁸ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. I(c), 10/1-15/61: Box 194

../../ Defense TS(1) 11pp I-19136/61; ISA paper: "Concept for Intervention in Vietnam" with supplemental notes #1 and #2

¹⁹ Ibid.

10/05/61 WH S(...) 3pp; W.W. Rostow memo to JFK: "Southeast Asia"

thing. But this was before it really got down. All right. The next one you have.... Do you want to skip the next one?

MOSS: Let's see. The F.C. Child [Frank Clayton Child] item.²⁰

BUNDY: Yes, the F.C. Child item.

MOSS: Which is.... Oh, it's rather interesting because it's one of the first outside inputs, if you will, that really casts doubt on the ability of Diem to do things. And it comes through fairly strongly that maybe we're backing the wrong horse. And I was wondering how much this kind of thing.... I get the impression that it had a great deal of effect on people like Harriman and Hilsman [Roger Hilsman] and so on.

BUNDY: This kind of prognosis?

MOSS: Yes. And it may have had a strong effect in the White House. I was wondering if any of that got over into Defense.

BUNDY: I don't recall that it did. I don't recall that it did. This is an important point here. I

[-39-]

think that by and large we in Defense, our own people returning were on the whole very gung-ho, rather a little like this fellow Levy whose report you marked in September. And we didn't see as nearly as many of the skeptical civilians—the Teddy Whites [Theodore H. White], the others—we just didn't get that flow of stuff. It might have made a difference if we had.

MOSS: Because you'll be getting into the 1963 dichotomy between the Nolting and Harriman positions that really...

BUNDY: Yes. Yes, you are.

MOSS: ...is going to be a debated thing, I think, in the long run.

BUNDY: F. Child. I wonder who he was.

MOSS: He said something on that Michigan State [Michigan State University] public administration program.

BUNDY: Yes. Yes. Well, this is very interesting. As I say, this skeptical stuff didn't

²⁰ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. I(c), 10/16-31/61: Box 194
10/05/61 Private U 7pp; F.C. Child paper: "U.S. Policy in Vietnam" (attached to item of 10/31/61)

get shared as much of it as it should be. We were

[-40-]

more orthodox probably in the Defense Department, although everybody had their own private sources a great many times.

MOSS: Yes. Okay, what's the next item there?

BUNDY: Comment on an article on South Vietnam in the *Atlantic* for October of '61. That's interesting.²¹

MOSS: I don't think there's much in that. It may be another outside doubting kind of thing.

BUNDY: Lansdale. I don't recall anything. Lansdale staying in touch with Rostow is one of the things I do remember. There's a check list for Rostow of the things he might look at.²²

MOSS: This is prepared by Bob Johnson, as I remember.

BUNDY: Yes. Bob was all along one of the steady, very reliable fellows who became again to feel that it couldn't work by '64 or so.

MOSS: He seems to have had no axe to grind anywhere along here. He manages to give...

BUNDY: No. Bob is very, very honest, very honest staff man. He had come out of long years of service in the old NSC [National Security Council]

[-41-]

and went over with Rostow to the State Department, which was, of course, at a later point. But no, Bob is a man I have great respect for.

MOSS: Well, speaking of Bob Johnson, here is an October 31st item in which he is summarizing all the Washington planning and so on on Vietnam for McGeorge Bundy.²³ And I presume this is—I don't know whether it's in preparation for the move of Rostow to the State Department because that doesn't come to a little later, but it may well be.

²¹ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. I(c), 10/1-15/61: Box 194

../../. Private U 7pp; MGen Bela K. Kiraly memo to BGen E.G. Lansdale: "Comment on 'South Vietnam' the Atlantic Report, *The Atlantic*, October 1961, pp. 16-22" (Attached to item of 10/06/61)

²² Ibid.

10/14/61 WH TS(...) 8pp; R.H. Johnson memo to W.W. Rostow: "Subjects for Exploration in Vietnam"

BUNDY: You mean moving it over to my brother?

MOSS: Yes, that you brother is getting more and more involved in Vietnam at this point and what he has asked Johnson for is a real wrap-up. I wonder if you'd look over that and see if there's anything in it, particularly on the military planning end of things. Most of that seems to be in the Joint Chiefs. Is that so, that they had most of the con on that rather than ISA [International Security Affairs]?

[-42-]

BUNDY: No, we had a great deal of it. Very interesting passage in here in which Bob Johnson says, "I do agree that making a decision on the Taylor proposal, we'd need to face and decide in principle the question of whether we are prepared if necessary to step up very considerably our military commitment in Vietnam. If we commit six to eight thousand troops and then pull them out when the going got rough, we will be finished in Vietnam and probably in all of Southeast Asia." That's typical of the lines of thought, and this is by as balanced a man as you have. I notice that also in the last paragraph he says that one of the problems we face is "how we deal with Nehru [Jawaharlal Nehru] on the question of the Geneva Accords."

MOSS: Yes. This is something we missed in going through the earlier folders, but you get the beginning of a pressure to raise the MAAG ceiling back in May.

BUNDY: Yes. I think it was done by a small number then, but that was *de minimis*. It was at this time

[-43-]

that you realized that whatever you did, if it included substantial numbers of men, would involve a real breach of the ceiling in the accords.

MOSS: Articles XVI and XVII, right.

BUNDY: So no question that you had to think about that. And, of course, the basic point is that Nehru, in having his official visit to Washington, was going to see the President, and everybody was hoping to use that as an occasion for lots of goodwill and so on. And if you had to get into a tangle at that precise moment about putting him on the spot....

MOSS: That's right. This was in November.

²³ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. I(c), 10/16-31/61: Box 194
10/31/61 WH TS(...) 6pp; R.H. Johnson memo to McG. Bundy: "Planning for Vietnam"

BUNDY: All right. The next one is a memorandum, another one from Johnson to my brother, of November one. This is all work in preparation for Taylor's return, looking up all the availability of helicopters.²⁴

MOSS: There's one of those memos in there in which he is rather critical of the flood control effort

[-44-]

as a cover. I forget which one it was. I wondered how seriously that was taken.

BUNDY: You see, the flood thing was at its height when they were out there.

MOSS: That was minor at first.

BUNDY: It faded very, very much.

MOSS: And in fact the flood wasn't as serious as it looked. Isn't that so?

BUNDY: That's the way.... It died out very rapidly and people realized that they've had floods before in this country; this isn't the kind of catastrophe it could be.

Now I see the next one you've marked is a "For Appreciation of Vietnam" by Thompson [Robert K.G. Thompson]²⁵...

MOSS: Oh, that's the R.K.G. Thompson thing, yes.

BUNDY: ...of October 27th. That's very interesting.

MOSS: He saw Diem, I think, in September.

BUNDY: Right.

MOSS: They had announced a British mission. And Diem used this Thompson thing occasionally to stall the Americans, that he was looking at an alternative plan for things, you know, that he as looking at the British plan.

[-45-]

²⁴ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. II, 11/1-10/61: Box 194
11/01/61 WH TS(...) 2pp; R.H. Johnson memo to McG. Bundy: "Planning for Vietnam"

²⁵ Ibid.
10/27/61 UK S(...) 8pp; R.K.G. Thompson report: "Appreciation of Vietnam, November 1961-April 1962"

BUNDY: I think we managed it—and McGarr and Thompson were just at totally, totally different frequencies.

MOSS: Thompson is given the credit for the strategic hamlet approach.

BUNDY: Right.

MOSS: Did he really have the input himself, or was it looking at his experience by others that really set this off?

BUNDY: No, I think he had a major part in it. And he gave something to Diem....

MOSS: That Diem could have of his own?

BUNDY: Yes. Bringing in the people and all that. This is a very simple—this is almost a model of the kind of paper you could submit to a man like Diem. This has something in it for him and it's a good paper, I would say. I don't recall its playing a great part on the American side. There was a lot of friction.

Oh, now here's something very interesting. November 2, '61, from Mike Mansfield to the President.²⁶

[-46-]

MOSS: Yes. This is a very long and evidently very concerned....

BUNDY: Very, very, very fascinating. The collection of Mike's memoranda is one of the President's which we didn't usually see.

MOSS: It's a very pessimistic view, too.

BUNDY: Yes.

MOSS: And he argues in terms of the old "don't get involved on the Asian mainland" kind of thing.

BUNDY: "Revival of colonial force." That's an argument that was certainly made umpteen times. But this is interesting. Arriving on—taken from the November.... That would have been the weekend that Taylor arrived and the weekend the President was starting to consider it. So it couldn't have come at a more influential time. He refers to an earlier September memorandum.

MOSS: Which I don't recall seeing.

²⁶ Ibid.

11/02/61 Senate C(...) 4pp; Mike Mansfield memo to JFK: "The Vietnamese and Southeast Asia Situation"

BUNDY: “Democratic practices. Intellectuals.” It seems a little pie-in-the-sky.

[-47-]

MOSS: Yes. Yes, there’s that aspect to it, a little detached.

BUNDY: Very interesting organizational suggestions.

MOSS: Had something like this been shown to you people in ISA, what do you think you’d have done with it?

BUNDY: I don’t think we’d have been surprised. We were very skeptical of it. It’s very interesting. I can only surmise that that could have had.... It’s one of his most effective memoranda. I think this is closely argued. Incidentally, the man we were talking about who worked with Vice President Johnson on the May trip and was Mansfield’s man, his draftsman—I don’t think he was responsible for his thoughts—is Frank Valeo [Francis R. Valeo].

MOSS: Oh, yes.

BUNDY: Now, here we have something. I guess this is Robert Johnson’s comments on the Taylor report.²⁷ He says that expressed doubt about the task force and so on. He refers to *my* having doubts that we could persuade people that an attack on

[-48-]

Hanoi was warranted. And he urges that we not try to decide that. I don’t recall that we really argued the whole question of bombing of the North in any detail in that week.

[BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

I don’t get too much light on this. It’s interesting because this is on November 8th by which time you practically had it decided. I just don’t get all that much more out of it.

MOSS: Let me hit you with this one then. Here is a November 12th memorandum from Harriman.²⁸

BUNDY: Now we’re getting into something I’ve been curious about and don’t know

²⁷ Ibid.

11/08/61 WH TS(...) 5pp; R.H. Johnson memo to W.W. Rostow: “Comments on General Taylor’s Report on Vietnam”

²⁸ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. III, 11/11-20/61: Box 195

11/11/61 State S(...) 5pp; W.A. Harriman memo to JFK re a diplomatic-political course of action in Vietnam (attached to item of 11/12/61)

about. This is November 12th. November 11th, that was a Saturday.

MOSS: Where's my calendar? [Interruption]

BUNDY: Yes, I'm reasonably sure that the 11th was the Saturday.

MOSS: Yes, the 11th was a Saturday. [Interruption]

BUNDY: It's fascinating. In it, as you know, Harriman

[-49-]

proposed to the President that he be given authority to try out on Pushkin [Georgi M. Pushkin] whether the Soviets would play on extending the Laos negotiations to Vietnam, for practical purposes wind up the Laos negotiations in a settlement rapidly and then seek to work out a deal on Vietnam through roughly the same machinery. Well, this was the peak of Harriman's belief that the Russians were really playing in the Laos negotiations, his several discussions with Pushkin in which they'd ironed out key points. Now, I've seen something in the State Department files that indicated that on at least two occasions, Harriman did in fact take up with Pushkin whether the Soviet Union would be prepared to cooperate in working out a negotiated settlement on Vietnam. I don't know whether one of those times would have been shortly after this, whether the President may have said orally, "Go ahead. Do this very privately. Tell me what comes out of it. We'll see whether we can do it." You don't set the

[-50-]

chances particularly high. Harriman said, "It's worth a try. We don't lose for having tried it." My impression would be that the President must have authorized this on one or two occasions, and very likely this would have been one of them. It would fit because it was just at this time that, in fact, you were making progress on the external elements of the settlement. You still had the whole internal political problem in Laos to solve. But Pushkin had been helpful in ironing out things like the degree of veto on the ICC. This was a peak period of Harriman working very closely with him. He felt he had found the handle to the Laos settlement, and it would have been the very natural thing for him to recommend, "Let's just see if they're prepared to play this way on the Vietnam problem." I think it was tried, in other words, and I think it came to nothing—and I'm sure it came to nothing because if it hadn't you'd certainly—if it had led anywhere you'd have had it followed up.

[-51-]

So I think this is just a terribly interesting document. That would have gone to the President the very day that he was deciding. As I reconstruct it from other files, November 11th is categorically the day of decision. The following day Alexis Johnson informed various people that the President had made a decision in favor of what he called "a modified commitment." I

think that appears in Kenneth Galbraith's [John Kenneth Galbraith] journal, which also tells the story of the gay parties at the White House around those days. But anyway, that didn't interfere with serious [unclear] I don't think. But this would have hit at just that time. I've not ever looked at the cable traffic in the State Department on this subject, so I can't add anything from that standpoint. I imagine that Harriman would be able to recall off the top of his head or that William Sullivan [William H. Sullivan] would recall whether this wasn't tried. My strong impression would be that it was.

[-52-]

MOSS: There's another item in there in which he indicates a very definite bias against Diem as a viable...

BUNDY: Is that in the same memorandum?

MOSS: Yes, it's in the same memorandum. The second or third page, perhaps.

BUNDY: I think he was very skeptical of Diem. Later on I think he saw everybody in Saigon in the shoes of Phoumi [Phoumi Nosavan]. [Laughter] But Averell was...

MOSS: Somewhere down at the bottom of the page.

BUNDY: "If the government of South Vietnam continues their repressive, dictatorial, and unpopular regime, the country will not long..."

MOSS: And we'd better not get mixed up with them, or some words to that effect.

BUNDY: Yes.

MOSS: Engage our prestige, is that the phrase? Something like that.

BUNDY: Then he goes on to say, "additional military and increased U.S. participation and SEATO support should be promptly provided as necessary to hold the line. We want internal reform but we also had to supply the aid." He saw the same

[-53-]

dilemma. I always thought Averell was very clear on Vietnam. He didn't engage himself very much in it at this stage.

Now, the November 11. Ah, yes, there's the memorandum that Alexis Johnson submitted.²⁹

²⁹ Ibid.

MOSS: Okay. Is this the joint State-Defense recommendations thing?

BUNDY: That's the joint State-Defense final memorandum.

MOSS: All right. This was drafted by Alexis Johnson, was it?

BUNDY: Right. Well, it was drafted by Alexis Johnson back and forth during the week. Originally, a great deal of it came from an original draft that I did on the preceding Sunday, on the fifth of November. There was a meeting on Saturday, the fourth. McNamara undertook to draft a memorandum to the President, which in the end was revised so that it reflected the tentative views of himself, Gilpatric, and the Joint Chiefs. And this said, on the whole, we're inclined to recommend doing—it said as of Tuesday, along about the sixth or seventh, it said, we're inclined to think we should do it.

[-54-]

By the eighth, it had pulled back on the forces so that you eventually worked around to this. Paragraphs in this were from my original draft which in turn, I think, drew on the Taylor report and all kinds of things. It was the usual succession of drafts from different places. And it refers to Laos. It has pretty much everything in here. This is a rare case of a really clear joint recommendation.

MOSS: Now, I'm not clear on how we move from that to the instructions to Saigon.

BUNDY: Well, that was a much more detailed job done almost entirely in the State Department. I think that became an action thing in which the attempt to get Diem to make commitments and reforms was so much a detailed question that was left to State.

Now, November 13th. The National Security Action Memorandum.³⁰

MOSS: Which I take it is based on those recommendations.

BUNDY: Yes. Yes, it cuts out the flat-footed commitment.

[-55-]

MOSS: Right.

11/11/61 State TS(...) 8pp; Unsigned memo to JFK: "South Vietnam" (for discussion at noon meeting with JFK on 11/11/61)

³⁰ Ibid.

11/13/61 WH TS(...) 7pp NSC Control No. 34; B.K. Smith memo for the National Security Council, transmitting draft National Security Action Memorandum on Vietnam for discussion at NSC meeting on 11/15/61

BUNDY: Exchange letters. Here you have an interesting point that bears on the Harriman thing because there's a paragraph six that includes a private approach to the Soviet Union at the appropriate time.

MOSS: So it had been accepted in principle at that point.

BUNDY: Yes. And then was that in one of the earlier papers? Could I find it? I rather think it was. Yes. The November 11th memorandum from Alexis Johnson had referred to an approach to the Soviet Union. So this isn't Harriman's idea. Harriman's idea was somewhat different and would have been a "hold everything until I can talk to Pushkin."

MOSS: Ah, yes. Okay.

BUNDY: Now that apparently really wasn't done, you see. That really wasn't done. And I think maybe the thought was it really didn't stand that much chance. I see Galbraith's memorandum of November 13.³¹

MOSS: Oh, yes, commenting.... I think there are two

[-56-]

there, and one in which he takes apart the Taylor report and says we better clear out really.

BUNDY: Right. Now, this one he quotes in his journal. I've seen that.

MOSS: There is a later comment in there—it's a little further on—by Rostow on Galbraith's memo in which he says, "If Ken says we should get out, he better say it clearly."³²

BUNDY: Yes. These are the early cables on the...

MOSS: Oh, instructions to Nolting.³³

BUNDY: Yes. Heavner [Theodore J.C. Heavner], that's interesting. I talked to him

³¹ Ibid.

(attached to Rostow memo commenting on it, same date); 11/13/61 State TS(...) 4pp; J.K. Galbraith memo to JFK: "Neglected Parts of General Taylor's Report on South Vietnam"

³² NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. III, 11/21-30/61:Box 195

11/21/61 State TS(...) 10pp NEWD 9941; J.K. Galbraith message to JFK on Vietnam

11/24/61 WH TS(...) 3pp; W.W. Rostow memo to JFK commenting on Galbraith message, above

³³ NSF:Co:Vietnam Vol. III, 11/11-20/61: Box 195

11/15/61 State TS(...) 6pp Deptel 619(Saigon); Instructions to Ambassador Nolting for discussions with Diem

11/15/61 State TS(...) 4pp Deptel 618(Saigon); Instructions to Ambassador Nolting based on Taylor Report

the other day. He's a young Foreign Service officer—not so young any more, but he was working for Cottrell at the time. He's still got the light in his eye. I see one from Mac Bundy dated November 15th.³⁴

MOSS: Yes, this was a curious thing because it's the first clear piece of advice that I have seen from *him* on the whole thing. I remember when I asked him about it, I asked him how it happened.

[-57-]

He said, "Oh the President must have asked me at one point and just decided to put it down."

BUNDY: That's interesting. November 15th. That was after the decision.

MOSS: Yes. I wondered how firm decisions were. You did have to take actions and actions committed you to things.

BUNDY: That raises a question. I would have thought it was firm after the 11th, but this would suggest it wasn't.

MOSS: That there was still some looking back and saying, "Is this really what we ought to be doing?"

BUNDY: Yes. And he's really saying, "Are you really sure you're right in rejecting the troops?" Oh, the basic decision to put in combat troops if necessary.

MOSS: He hedged. He hedged.

BUNDY: He doesn't say we would do it now. "When needed," put it in later to fight if need be.

MOSS: Is this the one in which he talks about making

[-58-]

the commitment to have them available and using them as a card to play first rather than the committing them initially? There is one assumption there, I think, if I remember the memorandum correctly, and that is that he says it might not be necessary to send in the troops at all if you make the commitment; that Diem, having this commitment, might take care of things himself.

BUNDY: Yes.

³⁴ Ibid.

11/15/61 WH TS(...) 3pp; McG. Bundy memo to JFK offering advice on Vietnamese situation
11/15/61 WH TS(...) 3pp; McG. Bundy memo to JFK: "Notes for Talk with Secretary Rusk, Nov. 15"

MOSS: Or that it might give such a warning to the other side that they'd lay off.

BUNDY: And he also says, "I accept that the man in charge of the war must be a military man. McGarr has been inadequate." That's interesting that that was his view. "All the pressures will be in favor of a solid and virtuous but not quite first-rate man." That's about the way I would describe Harkins. [Laughter] "The man in charge of the war must be a military man. And Nolting not as his head man." That very much changed, of course. I think we all came to feel very, very clear that

[-59-]

there had to be....

November 15th. Oh, this is all the management problem.

MOSS: Which is that?

BUNDY: Mac on November 15th suggests Averell as assistant secretary to manage it.

MOSS: Oh, that one. The scenario for the Thanksgiving Day massacre.

BUNDY: Yes.

MOSS: That was a surprise when I found that one. I showed it to your brother and he was surprised. He said he'd forgotten it.

BUNDY: Mac is uncertain about Nolting, while Rusk is for him.

MOSS: Which I thought was interesting.

BUNDY: "Secretary says he's against bombing Hanoi but he believes we should do enough to put the result up to Diem." That's a pretty good summary of the way the Secretary did. The Secretary also saying, "We must try to hold even though we might lose. Show determination."

[-60-]

MOSS: Well, the question in both cases is how much is enough. And you never really find that out until it's...

BUNDY: "Rusk thinks, 'We must meet Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev] in Vietnam or take a terrible defeat.'" And he'd apparently taken that tone with Alphand [Herve Alphand] and Ormsby-Gore [William David Ormsby-Gore Harlech].

MOSS: I see that view implicit in other things, but never quite so hard as I do here.

BUNDY: That we must meet Khrushchev in Vietnam. The sense that the underlying adversary in Vietnam was Russia is very, very strong. And that emerges very much—I would not have realized how strong it was, that there wasn't a very strong sense of China as a threat at this stage.

MOSS: Yes. And that it's a counterpoint, too, to Harriman's belief that the Soviet Union could do something about the Laotian situation.

BUNDY: Right. Wow, this is quite a script, and all these personnel changes, I guess we'll let those speak for themselves.

MOSS: Came very near to the reality.

BUNDY: Very true, yes. Ball [George W. Ball] for Bowles.

[-61-]

Harriman for McConaughy [Walter P. McConaughy]. Bowles for Harriman essentially; the title at least. Rostow for McGhee [George McGhee].

MOSS: The one that interests me is McGhee for Nolting.

BUNDY: Yes. Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin] for Coerr [Wymberley Coerr]. Well, that's exactly what was done. Dutton [Frederick G. Dutton] for Hays [Lawrence Brooks Hays]. Hamilton [Fowler Hamilton] for Ball. Hamilton went to AID [Agency for International Development]. Well, that's a fascinating memorandum.

MOSS: That's a beaut.

BUNDY: That is the exact scenario for the Thanksgiving Day massacre, right there. It's not particularly directed against Bowles.

MOSS: No.

BUNDY: And my impression is that by this time there was.... I don't think that would have been a novel feature at this point.

MOSS: No. That's right.

BUNDY: I have the distinct impression that Bowles was through by this time.

MOSS: Long before, I think.

[-62-]

BUNDY: Bowles writes his memoirs as though he thought his ideas figured in the November discussion of Vietnam. They didn't; everybody had washed them out a long time back down the pike. The whole idea of a neutralized area with no apparent way of holding it, it just didn't seem realistic to anybody. I was reading his memoirs on this, and there's sort of a pathetic quality to them: "I was the center of the stage," when in fact he wasn't physically there and his ideas I can't even recall coming up during that period.

MOSS: No, I don't think they appear again until you get the French and Sihanouk [Prince Norodom Sihanouk] making neutralization noises later on.

BUNDY: Right. Now, you next have the November 18th report of Diem's reaction. I must say I've read all that file in the State Department.³⁵

MOSS: Yes. And I wonder about it. Was there anybody who at this time was really worried that Diem would temperize so much that we would not get our quid pro quo?

BUNDY: Oh, I think we fell so far short of getting our quid pro quo it's almost laughable to deal with it.

[-63-]

MOSS: Well, I know we did, but how early was it recognized that it was...

BUNDY: That we would?

MOSS: Yes.

BUNDY: Oh, I think toward the end of the month. I think this could have gradually sank in. This would have taken a very careful long memorandum, long negotiation, and it was inconsistent with going boiling ahead and sending helicopters and all that sort of thing. So it eventually got to the point where, "Look, we've got to chop this off if we're going to go ahead and add." We just didn't pull it together ever into a seriously coherent course of action, as I saw it. This is hindsight, and I don't recall thinking this at the time.

³⁵ Ibid.

11/18/61 State TS(...) 3pp Embtel 678(Saigon); Reports meeting with President Diem

MOSS: Because you get Nolting there on the scene feeling that he is still in tune with the instructions even if it's going slowly and even if it's back on the old Lansdale man-to-man kind of thing, and that he can pull it off.

[-64-]

BUNDY: Yes. Well, he wasn't really kept up on it. Nobody was really riding herd. Harriman wasn't back. I don't have the feeling that this was ridden very hard by the State Department or anybody else. And when Diem dug himself in, you just said, "Well, I guess we'll have to take the best we can get." And in a way, Galbraith's comments contributed to that because he said, "The so-and-so isn't worth a damn anyway and no promise he gives you will be worth anything." So in a way, you could have read Galbraith as saying, "If you decide to go with him, don't suppose you're going to get real reforms." That's one kind of choice. [Interruption]
Well, that's a very interesting memorandum.

MOSS: Which one is this?

BUNDY: About the test.... This is Walt Rostow on November 24 commenting on Galbraith's [see footnote 32].

MOSS: Oh, yes.

BUNDY: Saying Galbraith underestimates the guerrilla

[-65-]

aspect and the infiltration. It's a very moderate memorandum, but essentially brings it back to Walt's central point that we have to show that you couldn't mount a guerrilla war across frontiers.

November 26, there's more of the negotiation with Diem. I don't know...³⁶

MOSS: Oh, and there's the first BEEF-UP item.³⁷

BUNDY: Yes. Let's see. What date is that, 27? Yes, this is all the stuff that had been set in motion: the helicopters and the light aviation and this and that.

MOSS: That's an interesting point. The sailing of the helicopter ship Core from San Francisco was set in motion really before we had the agreement.

³⁶ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. III, 11/21-30/61: Box 195

11/27/61 State S(...) 3pp Deptel 693(Saigon); Advice on approaches to Diem by Nolting

³⁷ Ibid.

11/27/61 Defense TS(...) 11pp SecDef Control No. 2655; Status report of the military actions resulting from the NSC meeting of 11 Nov 61—Project "Beef-Up"

BUNDY: Yes. Absolutely. They departed on the 22nd of November and they were estimating it to arrive on the 10th of December. Now, did you mill around outside while you negotiated with Diem? You were setting deadlines by military actions.

[-66-]

It was not a well pulled together....

MOSS: And MSTs [Military Sea Transportation Service] prematurely announced the thing. Or I guess they had to; there was no way of getting around announcing the departure of a ship from San Francisco. You couldn't very hide it.

BUNDY: Right. All this sort of brings back the atmosphere of newness and hope that one had at the time.

MOSS: Tell me a little bit about that feeling of newness and hope.

BUNDY: Well, it did have that feeling. There was confusion, but you thought, "Here's something we can do if we put our minds to it." We really did think that. There were very pessimistic papers from time to time—"This won't work"—but the underlying feeling was, "It can be made to work. It can be. We've got a lot to add and there's enough to work with Diem." So that I think it wasn't a gung-ho feeling, but it was, "This is going to be tough and it's going to be long, but we ought to be able

[-67-]

to find a handle to it."

MOSS: Did it spin off the Thompson and Lansdale successes, do you think?

BUNDY: Yes, I think so. I think it spinned in part off that, a little bit perhaps off broader feelings rising from Korea. Certainly there's a little of the general feeling, "If the United States puts its mind on something, we *will* find the answer somehow."

MOSS: Let me go back to something, and that's the pre-inaugural Khrushchev speech on wars of national liberation and the whole counterinsurgency thrust that was going along parallel in '61, build up the special forces and that kind of thing. It's been said that that was too gung-ho at the time. What kind of feel do you have for that?

BUNDY: Oh, I thought it was carried pretty far. It frankly didn't affect me very

much, and it didn't affect my view of Vietnam very much. This was very much Walt Rostow's way of looking at that

[-68-]

thing, was in this wide doctrinal business. You see a sample of it in this memorandum to the President where he says, "The great task we face is whether we can manage to prevent the other side from establishing that it can conduct guerrilla warfare across frontiers." I never went through the comparison with other situations, but I thought each stood on its own bottom and there wasn't that much of a general connection. I thought the special forces thing was training people to do things that made good common sense and that certainly you needed this kind of an adjunct to your military capabilities. Others were much more persuaded in the whole thing, and then you had the creation of the Counterinsurgency Group and the counterinsurgency training course. I think they were both created in early 1962 so that they don't enter into the 1961 decisions. It was a lot of doctrine, a lot of speeches, Hilsman,

[-69-]

Nolting, various people in '61. Hilsman's a guerrilla alumnus. "Fight guerrillas by guerrillas." That never worked in any of the classic situations that Rostow studied. They were significantly different in there. One was Calvin and one was Luther [John Calvin; Martin Luther], so to speak, in the theology of counterinsurgency.

I think the professional officers, neither military nor Foreign Service were much influenced by that, and I put myself in their bracket. I'd seen situations like this before in the Philippines; the Greek parallel seemed important; the Philippine parallel had some points; the Malayan parallel had some points. None were really parallel because of the problem with the open frontier. I'd lived through the Greek thing as a lawyer for the Greeks; that seemed to me apropos. Obviously it turned on whether you could get the local people really stirred up and kindled and led and motivated to want to do this on behalf of the government and with the government. What was true was not new,

[-70-]

and what was new seemed to me a little bit phony, to sum up my own feeling. But I think there were others who were much more influenced by it. I think, however, its influence is exaggerated because the men who were most carried away by this line of thought were extremely articulate, wrote a great many memoranda, and made a lot of speeches, and the President was sufficiently taken with their ideas to found the Green Berets and all that. But I always had the feeling—and I've said this to Yarmolinsky [Adam Yarmolinsky] and a great many other people—that this thing was exaggerated in its true effect on policy actions. It had a certain coloration to it, but when you come to why the Kennedy administration dealt as it did with Vietnam, it was much more the sense of a worldwide confrontation with Russia, in 1961, than it was theoretical businesses about counterinsurgency.

MOSS: Did you ever talk to Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] or Max Taylor

on this?

[-71-]

BUNDY: Never really, no. I didn't talk to either one. And I never got the feeling Max Taylor really shared the counterinsurgency concept in the unorthodox lines that others did. His was much more a conventional military mind, I always thought. Now, Robert Kennedy was very strong on measures to help people and that aspect of counterinsurgency. Counterinsurgency had many mansions in it, you might almost say, and people were enthusiastic for one or another aspect. No question Robert Kennedy was the main spring of the Counterinsurgency Group and used it to ride herd on everything from policy to youth activities to road building in Thailand—those were three that he was always, always ready to be very, very tough on. It sort of combined justice and good works and military measures and bringing the economic good to the countryside. All of this had its good appeal; there's no question. I always thought it was made much too rigid as a doctrine. Frankly, when I was used to make the

[-72-]

introductory speech, more or less regularly over a period of time, at the counterinsurgency course—for some reason I don't know they asked me to do it and then they asked me again—I would always start my speech by saying that the title of this course bothered me, that I thought the Founding Fathers would roll over in their graves if they thought that American schools for career officers were training people in something called counterinsurgency, that this country stood for insurgency. I said one way to look at it was that we were the main revolution, really, in the changes of life in the underdeveloped world. We had brought a lot in specific help, but more particularly, we were the model, we were the one country most emulated. And we'd like to think we stood for a constructive kind of revolution, whereas the Communists would stultify and corrupt the whole thing in a kind of a counter-

[-73-]

revolution, and that what we were really doing was counter-counterinsurgency. I made this into quite a spiel at that time because it did bother me. It seemed it was an unduly negative word. When you spelled out what you actually meant by it, it included a heavy component of assistance and trying to help people find themselves politically and socially—which was patronizing in some people's eyes, presumptuous in other people's eyes, but which was genuinely idealistic, I'm sure, in the mind of most of the people in the Kennedy administration. So that the combination was do good and also protection in that the two went hand in hand, which was practical common sense in, say, the Philippines under Magsaysay. I just thought the wrong label was being used and that its universality was exaggerated. I remember also saying in these speeches, "Get to know your country because the main task is to help the country find its own way

[-74-]

of doing things. It isn't going to do things our way; it's going to do things in ways that derive more from their own history. If you get to understand them well, then you can help them."

MOSS: That's interesting in light of the Vietnam thing because this later Harriman-Nolting thing turns on Diem's belief that what we're doing is trying to tell them what to do.

BUNDY: Well, I think we were. From time to time we would.... It was very hard to deal with Diem, but that's an entirely different subject. Getting to deal with Diem was a particular human problem. No general principle could have prepared you for that. This was an extraordinarily stubborn and proud man with great dedication and patriotism, impossible to discipline in any sense. His control of his time—I never saw anything like it. The amount of time he would waste, literally waste, talking to people who didn't

[-75-]

have any consequence and who wasn't persuading him of anything, while twenty people were waiting with the main business of government outside his door. He was the greatest bottleneck in the history of human government that I've ever seen. Well, anyway, he had all his own things; I don't put him under any general rule though. But the general principle of trying to get as sympathetic to the country and understanding of its ways and why *they* do things in a certain way, I mean that hardly deserves anything more than the title "common sense." But it always seemed to me that in a prime counterinsurgency—or whatever you called it—trying to help any country, that the general rules were very simple. They were the rules of dealing with human beings in any situation—the Golden Rule, or what you will—and that what was needed was an attempt to get into their minds by understanding their history, by soaking in it. And I thought we weren't very good at that.

[-76-]

MOSS: We weren't very good at that. Did we have time to do it?

BUNDY: Well, there, you see, we always assumed this was going to be a short-term job. I think one of the most extraordinary things to look back on is to realize that all through the Kennedy administration and beyond, we never trained more than a handful of people in Vietnamese. We went along—and this had to do with the selection of Nolting, incidentally. Nolting and Ken Young were reversed, if my information is correct—I think it was told me at the time—because Young didn't have fluent French. And we went along on the idea that French was what was necessary.

MOSS: Right. Yes. If I remember, Parsons [J. Graham Parsons] went to Laos on the same basis back in the Eisenhower administration.

BUNDY: Very likely. Well, the French-speaking men by

[-77-]

and large were not culturally at home in Asia in the broad sense at all. All through the fifties this was true. There were a great many men whose French was good but who simply didn't like Asians. Instead of sending in men who had lived in other parts of Asia whose French was rudimentary and letting them scramble to the point where they could get it, I think they'd have done much better. And in the later periods when English was almost the universal language and there was less need of French, a lot of men did terribly well, who were just very good at understanding the way Asians might or in other Chinese-associated cultures. There was much too much general doctrine in all this period of techniques. It's almost a cast of mind in America that leads to mass production instead of tailoring things.

MOSS: All right. How much of this is due to the McNamara management approach?

BUNDY: A little of it. But a lot of this, all these

[-78-]

other schools of thought were—they weren't McNamara's dish particularly. And I think some of it had to do.... Certainly McNamara epitomized that kind of management approach. But I think he, if he'd left to do this problem, would have said, "Get more people who are expert on it." But he didn't. So I guess certainly that played a part in it. But you didn't have people saying, "Look, stop. Train some people for a year. Tell them they are going to spend the next five years of their lives with this problem. Extend the tours of duty for the military." Right at the beginning they were set wrong because everybody felt "This is the only war we've got and it's going to be Buggin's turn the next time up."

MOSS: Everybody's got to get his ribbon [campaign ribbon].

BUNDY: His ribbon. There was certainly that element in there. There wasn't nearly enough saying,

[-79-]

"Now, you're going to go to school for three or six months to understand these people well enough to behave when you get there, and then you're going to stay for a long, long while." We were just terribly short-term minded, terribly incapable of seeing what it was we were really doing on this problem or the depth of—and we underrated the language we needed. Because you could get along in French for business purposes. You simply didn't

get them talking, behaving like themselves. They were always artificial in the French language, just as anybody is artificial when he's talking somebody else's language.

MOSS: As a sidelight, I recall a friend of mine producing the first English-Djarrai dictionary—Djarrai being one of the hill tribes—sometime in 1965-66.

BUNDY: Oh, really. Well, this was the kind of thing that a really.... Well, the agency had quite a few people who had done this kind of thing in different areas of the world, and they had the more adventurous types. There were

[-80-]

lots of men you could have stimulated to do this in the agencies or brought in from the outside—like the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] during the war. The failure to use a fraction of our national resources on this effort, it seems to me one of the great tragedies, and I think it related in part to an excessively doctrinal approach to it.

MOSS: Yes. It was sort of rooted in our whole way of doing things?

BUNDY: In our whole way of doing things, yes. Well, I'm not...

MOSS: Back to the papers.

BUNDY: Let's see. I'm looking at one of the November 28th with alternatives and recommendations.³⁸

MOSS: I think that's a Johnson piece, isn't it?

BUNDY: That's right. This is when we were getting down to the nub and what happens if the thing breaks down. I can't recall that that had any great influence. There was a meeting along about the end of November in which

Kennedy was

[-81-]

about ready to say that if he doesn't agree pretty soon, we're going to lower the boom or do something. I see there's something in here about difficulties with the Thompson mission at the end of November, too. [Interruption] Thompson apparently had a plan for a different command structure? Oh, I see. [Interruption] This is that field command thing, which he never would do. [Interruption] Yes. I see Thompson's plan provided for the direct palace control. I always thought we were perhaps too conceptual on that.³⁹

³⁸ Ibid.

11/28/61 WH TS(...) 4pp; R.H. Johnson memo: "Possible Contingencies in Vietnam"

³⁹ Ibid.

11/30/61 State S(...) 4pp Embtel 737(Saigon); Comments on R.K.G. Thompson recommendations on Vietnam

MOSS: This next one, I don't know the origin of it. It's not clear as to who is producing the covering memorandum or the.... Now, let's see. This one is a letter to Joseph G. Harrison, *Christian Science Monitor's* overseas news editor, from someone unidentified. And there's a covering memorandum called "The Situation in Vietnam."⁴⁰ This is, what, December sometime, early December, I guess. Another one of these outside inputs.

[-82-]

BUNDY: Whose memorandum is this?

MOSS: I don't know. It's not identified. It says "we"; it's couched in phrases that smack of an NIE [national intelligence estimate], but it may come from the task force, it may come from somebody else; I don't know.

BUNDY: It sounds like the task force. [Pause] That's interesting.

MOSS: This is the letter, and I'm not...

BUNDY: Takashi Oka. That's interesting. That's very interesting. He's as smart as they come, as you probably know. Very, very able guy. He's coming back to the *Monitor*.

MOSS: In which he virtually writes Diem off.

BUNDY: Very interesting. Nine hours—fantastic television, for nine hours monitoring that. Well, I know this is.... Yes. "I really think that this event has gone far beyond the [unclear]." Oh, really. "When Taylor flew to the 17th parallel to see the DMZ [demilitarized zone], he was really taking a measure of Don [Tran Van Don], measuring the area as a possible course as General Don was imprisoned for three weeks after last November.

[-83-]

MOSS: And, of course, he figures very strongly later.

BUNDY: "Please excuse the [unclear] perhaps I'm too involved. We had come to love this country and its people and many fine friends. If the U.S. had put its foot down much earlier, much of the regime's present authoritarianism might have been prevented. We never really tried since we felt that old argument that these people aren't really ready for democracy."

⁴⁰ NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. IV, 12/1-10/61: Box 195
11/02/61 Press U 5pp; Takashi Oka letter to Joseph G. Harrison (*Christian Science Monitor*) re Vietnam (attached to items of 12/06/61)

“Height of arrogance for anyone to assume that someone else will never be ready for freedom.” I had that argument the other day with a bunch of Harvard professors. [Pause] That’s a fascinating letter; it’s a fascinating letter. I wonder who sent it to somebody at the White House.

MOSS: I don’t know. It’s not indicated there. I suspect, who is it, Harrison...

BUNDY: I just didn’t know Oka in this situation as well as that. He’s an extraordinarily fine man. And I see Bob Johnson says.... Oh, I see.

[-84-]

With a letter that’s sent over from Lucius Battle [Lucius D. Battle]—that’s very interesting—from the State Department.

MOSS: So it may have been sent to somebody in the State Department and Battle forwarded it to...

BUNDY: And Battle forwarded it over to Johnson and Taylor. Again, it causes me to comment that we didn’t see much of that stuff, if any, in the Defense Department. I didn’t see—I know I didn’t see this or wouldn’t have.

MOSS: Why wouldn’t they have sent it over?

BUNDY: I just don’t know. We just weren’t on the mailing list for this kind of thing. It puzzles me. I don’t think anybody was consciously withholding; we just weren’t on the same circuits at this time.

MOSS: This raises the question of whether or not the Kennedy administration in tearing down the OCB [Operations Coordinating Board] managed to put something in its place that would really do the job. I don’t know whether the OCB would have gotten this through to everybody either, but....

[-85-]

BUNDY: Yes. I see Walt Rostow on December 6th saying we’ve got to get somebody to replace McGarr. I may be depending too much on that one impression in Honolulu, but...⁴¹

MOSS: It certainly crops up here and there several times.

BUNDY: Young Van Fleet [?]. And also very much in favor of sending Lansdale

⁴¹ Ibid.

12/06/61 WH S(...) 1p; W.W. Rostow memo to JFK: “A final direct word from me on South Vietnam, as a member of your personal staff”

out and saying you may have to enlist the Attorney General to do it, suggesting somebody was against it.

Yes, here's the Diem letter.⁴² Johnson says Secretary Rusk's press conference—this is on December 11th—Robert Johnson says the Secretary's press conference has pretty much given everybody...

MOSS: The letter is just a formality.

BUNDY: I've read the *Times* articles, and it's remarkable how low-key all this came out in the paper; the low-keyness—which I'm sure on Kennedy's, on the President's part had to do with the ICC problem in India in part.

[-86-]

MOSS: I wouldn't be at all surprised.

BUNDY: But I've never known what he did to consult any congressmen or anything of that sort.

MOSS: There's another aspect on that ICC thing that's there's a smattering of. I don't know whether it's been in anything you've seen yet or whether we'll get to it later or not. I don't even recall whether I've marked it. There's a question of just how frank we were with the Canadians and the British on how many troops were going in and how far we were pushing it.

BUNDY: Well, we didn't know. Well, that's a good question. I know we talked to both the Canadians and the British; I've seen files on that.

MOSS: Yes, I know we did.

BUNDY: And I knew, in a way, we talked to the Indians. But I think we said we were going to send in a few thousand advisors and helicopters; we didn't indicate that it was going to get to, what, twelve

[-87-]

by the end of that year and sixteen by the end of '63.

And there's something about Nhu's anti-U.S. biases.

⁴² Ibid.

12/07/61 State S(...) 5pp Embtel 766(Saigon); Text of letter Diem has agreed to send JFK

NSF:CO:Vietnam Vol. IV, 12/11-31/61: Box 195

12/11/61 WH C(...) 1p; R.H. Johnson memo to McG. Bundy: "The Exchange of Letters between President Kennedy and President Diem"

12/13/61 State C(...) 2pp Deptel 769(Saigon); Text of JFK letter to Diem

MOSS: Yes, this is...

BUNDY: I think we got quite a lot of that off and on.

MOSS: Well, this is the first time that I see Nhu really cropping up doing this kind of thing or being reported doing it. There's a great deal of it later on, particularly in mid-'63, where everything that comes in characterized—particularly the CIA field reports.

BUNDY: Here's the military command.⁴³ I knew quite a lot about that.

MOSS: I wanted to ask you about that because in...

BUNDY: I think you'll find it's changed as it went along here.

MOSS: In your interview with Elspeth Rostow [Elspeth Davies Rostow], you said that it was one of those bureaucratic problems, but I'm very intrigued with the CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific]-MACV lash-up and the later

[-88-]

belief that maybe there should have been a direct tie to JCS [Joint Chiefs of Staff] from MACV.

BUNDY: Well that, yes. Now, that wasn't—accepting the reporting through CINCPAC, I think McNamara right along worried about that. But he was trying to get everything else squared away and was trying to get them to accept.... He was trying to get the military to accept essentially that the ambassador was going to be the number one man.

MOSS: Okay. That's one aspect of it. The other aspect of it is a question of how much operational control CINCPAC has as the middle man and CINCPAC meddling in operations.

BUNDY: It's a very fair question. As McNamara saw him, CINCPAC was no particular help on operations within South Vietnam. I think parenthetically that he deplored the very much later separation of the bombing war and the war within, very much

[-89-]

⁴³ Ibid.

11/22/61 Defense S(...) 1p SecDef Control No. S-1454; R.S. McNamara memo to JFK: "Military Command in Saigon" (appointment of Paul D. Harkins)

indeed. But I think he'd got himself stuck with it. He felt he could live with it. It had to do the logistics so there it was.

Here's a report I see on what was being delivered on the...

MOSS: The steps being taken in the whole PROJECT BEEF-UP thing.

BUNDY: Well, there we are.

MOSS: Yes. That gets up through 1961, and we've used about almost two hours.

BUNDY: We want to do this again on another '63 period?

MOSS: I think that perhaps we should. Yes. I have very little, really, on '62.

BUNDY: '62 is a thin year.

MOSS: '62 seems to me to be a year of trying to make it work and how are we doing, well, we're doing thus and so. You do have the settlement in Laos and the beginning of the...

BUNDY: I didn't have very much to do with that, you see.

MOSS: ...strategic hamlet program and so on. One thing I do notice is that throughout '62 you do get coup rumors and things of Big Minh [Duong Van Minh] being

[-90-]

dissatisfied, continuous reports of this sort that there is grumbling.

BUNDY: Oh, really? You could sense a lot of that?

MOSS: It's in the official papers; it's not just the newspaper reporters. There is some of this, and I was wondering how much of this communicated, if any?

BUNDY: Well, it was sort of a background music kind of a thing. I'm sure it got communicated, that we were getting reports of discontent, and that the military might at some point move again—you had a very vivid picture, however, that it was very likely to be coffeehouse talk.

MOSS: Yes. The Caravelle bar.

BUNDY: The Caravelle bar. Or even the military just didn't seem to have it. Then you had one incident in February of '62 of the bombing of the palace,

which just didn't trigger anything. And I think we began to get more of a feeling than was warranted that Diem was not really opposed. He obviously wasn't enlisting his people and he didn't have the whole-hearted support of his military or

[-91-]

anybody. But nonetheless, that there really wasn't any effective group in opposition.

MOSS: Right, right. And this becomes a big question later on. Well, let's talk about 1963 another time.

BUNDY: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW #2]

[-92-]

William P. Bundy Oral History Transcript – JFK #2
Name Index

A

Alphand, Herve, 61

B

Ball, George W., 61, 62
Battle, Lucius D., 85
Bell, David E., 15
Bowles, Chester B., 12, 61, 62, 63
Bundy, McGeorge, 1, 15, 42, 44, 57, 60
Busby, Horace, 10

C

Calvin, John, 70
Child, Frank Clayton, 39, 40
Clifton, Chester V., Jr., 1
Coerr, Wymberley, 62
Cottrell, Sterling J., 3, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18,
19, 30, 32, 57

D

Decker, George H., 36
Donovan, William J., 25
Duong Van Minh, 90
Dutton, Frederick G., 62

E

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 7, 20, 77

F

Felt, Harry D., 18, 37

G

Galbraith, John Kenneth, 52, 56, 57, 65
Gilpatric, Roswell L., 2, 6, 7, 8, 12, 15, 54
Godel, William H., 25
Goodwin, Richard N., 62

H

Hamilton, Fowler, 62
Harkins, Paul D., 34, 59
Harlech, William David Ormsby-Gore, 61

Harriman, William Averell, 16, 29, 38, 39, 40, 49,
50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 60, 61, 62, 65, 75
Harrison, Joseph G., 82, 84
Hays, Lawrence Brooks, 62
Heavner, Theodore J.C., 57
Heinz, Luther C., 13, 31
Hilsman, Roger, 39, 69, 70

J

Johnson, Lyndon Baines, 5, 9, 10, 11, 48
Johnson, Robert H., 19, 41, 42, 43, 44, 48, 81, 84,
85, 86
Johnson, U. Alexis, 11, 12, 13, 14, 30, 52, 54, 56

K

Kennedy, John F., 1, 3, 8, 27, 38, 44, 46, 47, 50,
51, 52, 54, 58, 69, 71, 74, 77, 81, 85, 86
Kennedy, Robert F., 71, 72, 86
Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeyeovich, 61, 68

L

Lansdale, Edward G., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 25, 41, 64,
68, 86
Levy, Robert, 29, 40
Lodge, Henry Cabot, Jr., 5
Luther, Martin, 70

M

Magsaysay, Ramon, 5, 74
Marcy, Carl M., 11
Martin, Edwin M., 10, 11
Mansfield, Mike, 10, 11, 46, 47
McConaughy, Walter P., 62
McGarr, Lionel C., 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 46,
59, 86
McGhee, George, 62
McNamara, Robert S., 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 33, 34, 35,
54, 78, 79, 89
Meloy, Francis Edward, 10

N

Nehru, Jawaharlal, 43, 44
Ngo Dinh Diem, 4, 5, 6, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 31, 39,
45, 46, 53, 55, 59, 60, 63, 65, 66, 67, 75,
83, 86, 91

Ngo Dinh Nhu, 6, 88
Nitze, Paul Henry, 6
Nolting, Frederick E., Jr., 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 23, 32, 40,
57, 59, 60, 62, 64, 70, 75, 77

O

Oka, Takashi, 83, 84

P

Parsons, J. Graham, 77
Phoumi Nosavan, 53
Pushkin, Georgi M., 50, 51, 56

R

Rostow, Elspeth Davies, 88
Rostow, Walt Whitman, 1, 2, 3, 4, 11, 17, 37, 38,
41, 42, 57, 62, 65, 66, 68, 70, 86
Rusk, Dean, 24, 60, 86

S

Sihanouk, Prince Norodom, 63
Sorensen, Theodore C., 15
Souvanna Phouma, 16
St. Claire, Darrell, 11
Staley, Eugene A., 21, 22
Steeves, John M., 18

Sullivan, William H., 52

T

Talbot, Phillips,
Taylor, Maxwell D., 3, 4, 23, 34, 37, 38, 43, 44, 47,
48, 55, 57, 71, 72, 83, 85
Thanat Khoman, 24
Thant, U, 10
Thompson, Robert K.G., 45, 46, 68, 82
Tran Van Don, 83
Truscott, Lucien, 32

V

Valeo, Francis R., 48
Van Fleet, Young, 86

W

Westmoreland, William C., 34
Wheeler, Earle G., 36
White, Theodore H., 40
Williams, Haydn, 13, 19

Y

Yarmolinsky, Adam, 71
Young, Kenneth T., 1, 77