MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE 0930, 19 September 1963

President Eisenhower
Mr. John McCone
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Before coming, the main topic of conversation General Eisenhower asked Mr. McCone how the Test Ban Treaty had gone. McCone said the Treaty was O.K. The Government was committed to what the CIA and the Joint Chiefs had thought necessary by way of safeguards. AEC had shot a 250-Kiloton warhead underground the other day, and in addition to the vitality of the laboratories is being maintained and the proving ground in the Pacific will not be allowed to run down. There was some discussion as to whether the language of the Treaty excluded the use of atomic weapons during war but General Eisenhower did not push his concern in this matter. He said, rather, that his main worry now was that peaceful uses of atomic explosions could no longer proceed. Mr. McCone said that the purposes of the Treaty were among to prevent proliferation of Atomic weapons in smaller countries, in addition to the desire to make one small step in the development of mutual trust.

We had striven for years to achieve a treaty on Plowshare with the Soviets — with no results. As a result we decided that if the Plowshare were included in the Treaty, it would negate the proliferation. After all, the firing of an atomic warhead for peaceful purposes would at least indicate whether the warhead functioned. Another disadvantage to our cranking Plowshare into this Treaty is the fact that digging a canal by use of atomic energy, for example, requires some of our most advanced
in the effort to keep the techniques clean but still effective. We were not anxious to allow others to look inside our weapons, something that would probably be necessary.

General Eisenhower said that another thing that concerns him over the Treaty is the fact that it is much froth over little accomplishment. Mr. McCone admitted this, saying that if China and France choose to ignore the Treaty, which they have largely negated regarding proliferation.

The Soviet have cranked a reservation into the Treaty on French activities. We, of course, have a reservation on everyone.

General Eisenhower inquired who had instigated this treaty and why it was necessary to go to Moscow to sign it. Mr. McCone did not know the answer to this. He stated his personal preference for Vienna as a place for the negotiation. As background, Mr. Khrushchev had always refused any Treaty other than a comprehensive Test Ban Accord. This he had repeated to the Head of the British Labor Party, Harold Wilson, in May. The reason he had given was that the US wanted to test underground because the type of weapons that lend themselves to underground testing fit into the U.S. concepts for strategy in case of general war. In the meantime the U.S. was preparing
some atmospheric tests. Tests up to 60 megatons had been put forward,
but Mr. McConne had recommended to the President instead
that the U.S. develop and make more efficient the weapons that can be
carried by our missiles. This the President had approved.

Then out of the blue, Mr. McConne went on. President Kennedy
made a speech at Georgetown proposing a ban on atmospheric testing,
a speech that did not worry Mr. McConne since in the light of the Khrushchev
statement to Mr. Wilson. Almost immediately, Mr. Khrushchev indicated
limited he would accept such a test ban if such were linked to a non-aggression
pact. Mr. Harriman was sent to Moscow where he was informed that
little was expected by way of results. Three days later, however, the
Soviets had changed their tune and agreed to the limited test ban treaty
without the non-aggression pact. The whole thing is very puzzling.

Then General Eisenhower told of his experience at Freedoms Foundation
a couple of days before. A Mrs. Hood had quoted Senators Thurmond, Russell
in their objections to the Treaty and had
and Stennis and urged him to withdraw his support of the Test-Ban Treaty.

He had told Mrs. Hood that if circumstances had been different
if this test ban had been brought up to him in its embryo stages he might
have refused. However, with ninety countries having signed the Treaty,
would now be almost
all concerned over fall-out propaganda. It is impossible for the United States
then all by refusing notification
to render a slap in the face to the rest of the world. General Eisenhower
described the entire operation as a snow job on the Senate.
Mr. McCone said that his position had been the same as the Joint Chiefs of Staff although developed independently. He mentioned that Senator Thurmond is so bitter over the integration issue that everything (sigh) Mr. Kennedy is wrong. He cited as an example his own experiences with Senator Thurmond on the feasibility of an anti-intercontinental ballistic missile. The discussion then went on to the values of the Nuclear Evaluation Committee organized by General Eisenhower as President and on the possible situation which would exist after an exchange of nuclear stockpiles.

On General Eisenhower's request Mr. McCone came to the purpose of his visit which turned out to be the situation existing in South Vietnam: He began by giving the background as he saw it.

Mr. McCone had talked with President Diem a year ago this last June and had also seen Mr. Nhu. Diem was concerned about the possibility of a coup against his government, resulting from a growing dissatisfaction in the people as a whole and to some extent, although less so, within the military. This was particularly rampant in the cities. Causes for the dissatisfaction (which Mr. McCone duly reported) were the repressive measures taken by the Diem regime and prevalent nepotism in his government. For example, Mr. Nhu had no official position but nevertheless
I am reporting formally

the responsibility for the execution of the strategic handling

hamlet program (which on the U.S. side was done by the CIA).

Mr. McConne represented the strategic hamlet program as being

a success, although in the South—Mekong Delta in the South only

at the moment

50% of the villages were protected. The reason for this is that

the villages were being overcome, in vulnerable locations. In addition,

there are many Viet Cong in that particular area.

Up to May 8, Mr. McConne went on, the war was going better.

the strategic hamlet program was underway, and the only cloud on the

horizon was the deterioration in the home front, largely on the part of

the intellectual elite.

The first open incident occurred on May 8th and resulted from

a Catholic priest's running up a Catholic flag over a church. The

Buddists had begun to riot and some shooting resulted. There

is no indication that the Buddhists were Communist-infiltrated, but there

are indications that there are political moves within that sect. Our govern-

ment attempted to pressure Diem into less repressive measures, but to

no success. At that time our government had seen no alternative to Diem.

The situation was exacerbated, however, on August 21, when some

of Diem's special forces cut loose and raided some Buddhist pagodas

suspected of harboring subversives. Press criticism became very strong-

of the Diem regime, and there are two reporters in Saigon who are making
a corner of trying to topple the Diem regime. Mr. McCone pointed out that the present Administration listens to the press very carefully.

... have now developed within the Administration two positions. One, held by Mr. Harriman insists that Diem must go. Mr. McCone gave the opinion somewhat sheepishly that Mr. Harriman is largely motivated by the desire to undo everything that President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles ever did. General Eisenhower agreed readily and said that while Harriman is pleasant to himself on the surface, he is undoubtedly attempting to do this. He described Harriman as simply stupid.

Mr. McCone then continued that the other group is lead by Secretary McNamara who has made a personal war of this Vietnamese engagement. He feels that the government should go slow, that the war is going well, that we could not rebuild the government, and that any political actions to overthrow the government should certainly wait until the war is won.

Mr. McCone then turned to the Lodge situation and gave the Administration's side of the story of this appointment. Mr. Lodge had apparently approached this Administration six months ago and had said he would like to be of help in some capacity. He felt that his opportunity would lie in someplace like Vietnam. This was, at least, President Kennedy's viewpoint as expressed to Mr. McCone. General Eisenhower became heated over this allegation and said that this was a lie as far as Lodge's representations...
to him were concerned. He reiterated that Mr. Lodge had informed
him of the words of President Kennedy, that Lodge was the only man in
the United States could do this job. He admitted that his advice, which had been of the President's Lodge had not followed
had to make this statement public was not followed.

Mr. McCone later said that he thought the two viewpoints were con-
sistent that Mr. Lodge had made his offer informally
over a drink to the Administration, possibly at the instigation
of Mr. Hilsman, had put the pressure on him.

At any rate, when Mr. Lodge went to Vietnam, McCone had
been confident that he would approach his new tasks in a cold, unemotional
manner. He had been extensively briefed by the CIA and would have a
talk with Admiral Felt in Honolulu. In Tokyo, however, he had talked
with State Department officials who are highly anti-Diem and he has at
his right hand now in Saigon a man who has been dedicated to "getting"
Diem ever since the latter came to power. At any rate, Ambassador
Lodge has taken highly subjective and emotional approach in his dealings in
Saigon.

One of the greatest errors, in Mr. McCone's opinion, consisted
of a telegram sent by the State Department to Mr. Lodge on August 24th.

This cable had been coordinated with the Department of Defense
of CIA had been read over the telephone to Mr. Kennedy at Hyannisport, but
the text not studied by him. The cable said that Diem
regime should be knocked over. Mr. McCone was on leave at the time,

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all of Washington became alerted and the atmosphere became electric.

He came back and advocated an approach to go slow. He had instigated an investigation to determine whether there was sufficient support in the CIA aspect of it.

Vietnamese military and the public to engineer a bloodless coup without degenerating into Civil War. The survey indicated that, like the situation with Sukarno in 1958, there was not enough dissatisfaction for this to come about. Gradually things have cooled off in Washington but the cleavage between those who feel that Diem must go and those who feel that Diem should stay is still strong. He added humorously that the Potomac River is supposed to be the dividing line, since Defense and CIA on the Virginia side are the ones who feel he should be retained. Mr. McConie said that this is not entirely accurate, since the CIA has not taken a definite position.

Again General Eisenhower became highly irritated and said this is what a NSC is for. He could not understand how such a cable could be sent by State and asked if this had gone over Rusk's signature. Mr. McConie Secretary said that Rusk had been on leave and this was obviously a machination of Mr. Harriman and Mr. Hilsman. Some senior officers were involved; State Department, for example, claimed that they attempted to staff the message with CIA but that Mr. McConie's deputy was playing golf, an activity he has not indulged in for two years. Furthermore, they claim that both General Taylor and Secretary McNamara were unavailable. They had made no further attempt to coordinate the telegram apparently and the cable was simply sent.
More recently, Lodge, in Vietnam, has sent an hysterical telegram saying that the regime is sinking and we must find a substitute for it.

Through it all President Kennedy has been more inclined to caution that anyone else. At this point, I mentioned some statements that President Kennedy had made that the Diem regime was out of contact with the people.

General Eisenhower added emphatically that the President has been no help in his public utterances. Mr. McCone admitted all this, but insisted that President Kennedy has been more moderate than his advisors. He had been very much torn in the government and has, after all, to contend with the ADA liberals who want to reform every country. General Eisenhower responded more vehemently and demanded to know who had appointed all of these liberals who surrounded the President. He said he felt that Mr. Kennedy was afflicted with some of the same difficulty that Harriman had, that of trying to act as if everything was the Administration had done was wrong and that the watchword of this administration was simply immaturity.

Mr. McCone made no comment but went back to the Lodge situation, saying he was sorry Mr. Lodge had gotten himself on this peg. President Eisenhower went on to describe his experiences with the Buddhists and pacifists, and the fact that they were strongly inclined to pessimism. He mentioned as an example, the fact that the Burmese Premier, a Buddhist named U Nu, in complaining to him about the disrupting effect of U.S. wheat shipments on the Burmese rice market, had pointed out his own religion as almost forbidding such a complaint. Mr. McCone said that the
the Catholics and Buddhists were the groups most impregnable against
the Communists in Vietnam but that only 10% of the population are Catholic
and of the 70% who claim to be Buddhists, only very few are real practicing
members of the sect.

If General Eisenhower asked if Ambassador Lodge is to be replaced,
he was not; rather

To which Mr. McNamara said, they were going to try to persuade

Diem to make reforms and perhaps remove Nhu. To President Eisenhower's

question he said the Madame Nhu was completely impossible.

General Eisenhower said there is nothing to be accomplished by

violence in this situation. If these events were occurring on an island

without outside pressure, such might be the case but it is not. Military

forces in Vietnam must be made to realize that under present conditions

civil war would destroy their country. He further said that somebody

should write Lodge urging him to be less emotional at this point. As an

aside, General Eisenhower said that Lodge was an ace in his only other

diplomatic experience, the United Nations. He was quick, agile and

emotional, hitting back at the Soviet delegate whenever an accusation was

made, thus denying the Soviets the exclusive headlines for the day. On the

other hand, he tends to think in solutions become fixed on a certain eventualities

or course of action. As example, during the 1952 campaign, Mr. Lodge had

come and told him that he would lose the election if he did not come out for

federal

FEPC, this he had refused to do. General Eisenhower did not believe in

FEPC
a federal FEPC as a way to solve the integration problem then or now.

Mr. Lodge had of course been delighted with the outcome of the Presidential campaign that year but had certainly been a victim of his own fixations while the campaign was in progress.

As to future moves, Mr. McConie reiterated that President Kennedy wants to persuade Diem to take some 18 or 20 reforms to maintain his regime. In time a coup may be in order, similar to one promulgated in Ecuador, and Diem might be sent back off to a monastery. But this is not the time.

There is evidence, Mr. McConie said, that Nhu is in contact with Hanoi, an eventuality that puts new light on things. Ho Chi Minh would certainly pay anything to Diem to obtain access to some of the rice in the Mekong Delta and also to get the United States forces out of South Vietnam. President Eisenhower agreed but said that the military should certainly want us to stay.

At this time, Mr. McConie went on, things are at somewhat of an impasse in Saigon. Ambassador Lodge has had one talk of 1 hour and 45 minutes was totally unproductive. He said at that time he had nothing further to say. He advised Washington that his tactic was to remain completely aloof and he feels it is having some results.

President Eisenhower said he felt that Diem could certainly throw out the two reporters who had launched a vendetta against him. He cited the role of American public opinion, led by the press, in the Cuban situation, which resulted in Castro's taking power. He emphasized strongly that State
Department should be kept out of the business of engineering coups. The role of the State Department should be to show the might and the position of the United States and that CIA should do the clandestine work. Our U.S. personnel within Vietnam should make every effort to develop good relations with the military.

Mr. McConne agreed and said that CIA should keep the details of their clandestine activities to themselves. Certainly the details cannot be worked out in the National Security Council and anything he tells the State Department appears in the New York Times the next morning.

President Kennedy has shown his concern with the situation by having several meetings of the Executive Committee of the NSC. However, there is one man on the NSC who should not be there. Again General Eisenhower became perturbed and expressed concern over the future of the United States. Mr. McConne humorously mentioned the poll which had been taken recently which indicated that General Eisenhower could still be returned to office in 1964 by a vote of 53%. He mentioned that Mr. Kennedy had called him up about that and asked if the General would like his job back. Mr. Kennedy is apparently quite sensitive about this poll.
The conversation

Mr. McConne then said that the rest of the world is fairly quiet. He mentioned some difficulties that Nasser is encountering and General Eisenhower mentioned that Brazil is a place that concerns him very much.

The conversation then turned to personal matters such as plans for the winter in California and the like. I left the meeting at this point.

J. S. D. E.