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(Feb. 22, 1969 WWR)

To: Henry Kissinger

From: Walt Rostow

Mutual Withdrawals: Major Issues

My specific comments follow the headings of the paper of this title.
General comments at the end.

1. Preconditions for Allied Withdrawals

Option b agreed if, but only if:

-- Allied withdrawals are accompanied by an agreement for long-term monitoring of re-infiltration;

-- This agreement goes into effect as troop withdrawal schedule reaches not more than half-way point;

-- Hanoi accepts, implicitly or explicitly, Japanese, Indonesian, etc., roles in monitoring peace settlement;

-- All of Laos included in monitoring.

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Comment: This paper has nothing to say about long-term monitoring of settlement in Vietnam and Laos -- only inspection and verification of withdrawal. There is nothing to prevent a strategy of six-months' relative quiescence and then re-starting infiltration and war when our troops have departed. If is no answer to say: this matter is dealt with in another paper.

2. Phasing of Withdrawals

Option b agreed if, but only if:

-- There is an agreed schedule we can check, month-by-month;

-- monitoring of re-infiltration is as above, in comment on question. 1.

3. Residual U. S. Forces

Depends on over-all solidity of deal, especially firmness of long-term inspection arrangements.

Don't be impressed if Hanoi wishes U. S. bases and some effective forces to remain:

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- to guarantee former VC against slaughter;
- as a hedge against Chicom pressure on Hanoi,

4. Composition of Other Side's Withdrawals

I think we can live with option b (regular forces plus fillers) and do not require the regroupees as in option c. They are southerners. If they wish to stay, we would be in the position of forcing men to return to a Communist regime when they did not desire it -- always unpleasant. They would, of course, have to be watched closely.

5. Relationship of Withdrawals to Laos and Cambodia

Option d agreed.

6. Inspection and Verification of Withdrawals

The critical issue is not addressed here; namely, long-term inspection and verification arrangements concerning re-infiltration. If we get -- and we must get -- the latter, then we can be fairly relaxed about the *formal* actual inspection ^{and} verification of withdrawals, except for measures to assure that North Vietnamese regulars are pulled out of VC units. *Our own intelligence on VC withdrawals should be pretty good; that is, their movements*

7. US-GVN Positions on Mutual Withdrawals

Option c, which is recommended in the paper, is most ^{serious} dangerous because it signals a fairly thoroughgoing misunderstanding with Saigon, covering much ^more than the withdrawal issue itself. The recommendation does not belong in this paper but relates to the whole pattern of US-GVN relations.

8. Relationship of Mutual Withdrawals to Negotiations on a Political Settlement In South Vietnam

If a withdrawal agreement can be negotiated with long-term inspection, including Laos as well as Vietnam, then a Hanoi willingness to move along this line is, in effect, an abandonment of the VC in the south. It would leave the long-term status of the VC up to the GVN and would not even achieve guarantees against slaughter. Therefore, I tend to agree with Thieu that Hanoi will not go this route. If it did, and if (repeat if) we get long-term effective monitoring arrangements for Laos and Vietnam, then option C is all right.

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9. Response to Unilateral NVN Withdrawals

I would support an option not listed until we get long-term monitoring against infiltration into Laos and South Vietnam; namely, keep the military heat on.

Comment: You already know the thinking which lies behind these specific comments:

-- I incline to the view that Hanoi will go for a political settlement negotiated privately with Saigon rather than merely abandon the VC;

-- there are two possible exceptions to this view which might even be combined: they might pull forces out of South Vietnam, let the situation remain very quiet and peaceful while we were pulling out, avoid any formal commitments against re-infiltration, and start the war up when we were gone, and/or

-- they might do this in South Vietnam while continuing to press into Southeast Asia via Laos and Thailand. Our objective must be a permanent going-home of the North Vietnamese forces in Laos as well as South Vietnam.

-- You should be aware that a part of the reason historically in this town for the discussion of troop withdrawals was the view that our objective should be to get our forces out, with as much honor as possible, and then leave Southeast Asia to its fate. This explains how it could come about that the troop withdrawal paper is so casual about long-term inspection, ^{separate} Laos, ^{in part} and even a political settlement.

-- President Johnson's acceptance of the Manila formula did not have this background. It arose from Gromyko's suggestion that if the ultimate withdrawal of U. S. forces were clear, there was some chance for entering a general negotiation. From the time of the Manila meeting itself I have always held that our protection against its ambiguities lay in the commitment it contained against infiltration. So long as we convert that commitment from the other side into long-term arrangements which embrace Asians, as well as the ICC (using modern sensor devices, helicopters, etc.), the Manila formula is viable.

I am aware that various formulations of the withdrawal issue are designed to be fuzzy because men are uncertain about what our military position and negotiating power will be over coming months, including the steadiness of U. S. public opinion. I am not going to begin doing something I never do; namely, pose as a domestic political expert. That is why we elect Presidents. I would, however, say that we shall only confuse the other side and give them hope, if our position on mutual withdrawals, as presented in the weeks or months ahead, does not signal a clear and firm intent to achieve a solid peace in Southeast Asia, including Laos as well as SVN.