

MEMORANDUM

101

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 3, 1967

4:50 p. m.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: <sup>Tom</sup> Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of your meeting with educators from Cambridge, Massachusetts colleges and universities, on Tuesday, September 26, 1967 in the Cabinet Room.

The meeting began at 5:46 p. m. The meeting ended at 7:10 p. m.

Attachment

DETERMINED TO BE AN  
ADMINISTRATIVE MARKING.  
BY DCH ON 12-11-81

SERVICE SET

SEPTEMBER 26, 1967 - 7:10 p.m.

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Educators from Cabrdige, Mass. colleges  
and universities

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING  
WITH  
EDUCATORS FROM  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS  
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

September 26

1967

Cabinet Room

THE PRESIDENT: I received your letter and have studied it very carefully. I have the same feeling you have on the problems we face. I welcome the chance to hear from you and to convey to you anything that is important. It is only in this way that we can find the solution that we are searching for. I appreciate your judiciousness and your restraint in the way you approach this meeting.

GROUP SPOKESMAN: Mr. President, your response to our letter was deeply appreciated. This is a mixed group which is made up of political scientists, chemists, physicists, and college administrators. We are responsible only to ourselves.

We feel sure that we are representative of a large number of scientists and scholars who are troubled about Vietnam. These are men and women who do not carry placards but who find themselves agonizing and silent.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I'm very happy to have this opportunity to meet with you and I will take any questions or comments that you may have.

SPOKESMAN: Our principal question is how can we open the way to a stable, acceptable solution of the Vietnam problem. The doors must be open for the national aspirations of North Vietnam. We are impressed by the need to keep this open. By intensifying the air war we may be closing doors which would otherwise open. The recommendations of the Stennis Committee, in our opinion, point in the wrong direction. There is a common slogan of "get it over with." But we do not believe there is a military way to get it over. Our belief is that we must contract the war in the north by measured steps coordinated with diplomatic steps.

Some restriction or halt in the bombing is needed. The letter referred to the cost of the war versus the benefits. There are many intangible costs in addition to the lives and money which are being consumed.

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by ccy, NARS, Date 8-13-84

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There is a necessary preoccupation of our national leadership with this problem. At the same time there is much anxiety and dismay in America over the war.

Our conviction is that we should contract our operations in the north. This would be a judicious step on the road to negotiations. After this, we could have massive support for substantive steps down the road.

All of us are so concerned. We learned a lot about the issues which confront us today from Secretary McNamara. What we want to know is this: is there any way we can help in thinking through a rational root to a peaceful settlement?

THE PRESIDENT: I appreciate your remarks very much. There is much that you can do. There has been no time when you could do more. I am greatly disturbed by the division in this country, by the lack of information, and the over supply of misinformation.

The President and the country have to have support. From both extremes we are being subjected to mounting criticism -- from those who favor massive power and from those who feel we shouldn't be there at all. There are those who feel we have no national interest and so the extremes are "get it over with" or "get out."

We have limited objectives which require limited force. If our goal were the take-over of North Vietnam, we could do it. The real question is whether you can provide maximum deterrent at minimum cost.

I sense a feeling among you that we could have a reduction in bombing as a step to get to the conference table. We are anxious to do that. To do it unilaterally puts more pressure on us. It puts an extreme amount of pressure on us with our men around the DMZ.

The sentiment in the country is not very understanding. There are slogans of "stop the bombing," "get out now," and "try the enclave theory."

I have stopped the bombing six times. I did not get any indication of any action on their part. We are in touch with Ho Chi Minh today. The problem is not one of communication. The problem is that Ho wants South Vietnam. He isn't going to give it up. He doesn't want to talk about it.

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Ho has been told by me, very recently, that we would stop all naval and air bombardment if he would agree to enter negotiations.

All we want for South Vietnam is for them to have the right of self-determination.

Today we have the enclave theory at work on Hill 881 below the DMZ. The Marines can only stay there for thirty days. They are under constant rocket and mortar fire although we have sent the B52s in repeatedly to try to take out the gun emplacements which are shelling Conthien.

Numerically, the North Vietnamese outnumber us 3 to 1. The difference is in the 400 U. S. planes which tie down upto 700,000 of their people repairing their railroads, replacing their bridges, and rebuilding their highways. All of this would be freed to be used against us if we stopped the bombing.

The bombing is the cheapest thing we have to hold them. There have been at least two major proposals to stop the bombing. I have asked our officers about stopping the bombing. I have talked about our willingness to go anywhere at any time. I have said that we would draw a 10-mile circle around Hanoi and permit no bombing inside that circle. We did that last August. There is no way I can justify this except the very bare hope that they will talk. We are trying one more time.

I want you to treat this material in the most confidential manner possible. Treat it as you would top secret information which you would receive serving on an AEC Advisory Board.

We do not want to invade North Vietnam. We never thought it would bring us military victory. The bombing does have a deterring effect. It might motivate them to talk or at least make them inclined to talk.

I think there are two significant handicaps. The first is my over-zealousness to do almost anything for peace. The second is the enemy listening to our Senators. This dissent encourages the enemy to think that we will bring our own government to its knees.

We believe if we retire to the cities with an enclave theory it would be worse than surrender. It would get more people killed.

There are some differences between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and civilian leadership. But as long as I am Commander in Chief, the civilian

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leadership will make the final determination. It's difficult for me to say no to hitting Phuc Yen air field when the base sends up MIGs to shoot down our pilots. The JCS feel that it is a military target.

Frankly, I do not know how much longer North Vietnam can hold out. Their losses have been very heavy. We are trying to hold them there.

The question is where do we go from here? We are providing the maximum deterrent. We believe the time will come when their power to make war will no longer be there. The price will be enough to make them talk.

And it is important to remember that Ho killed more civilians in the four weeks before the South Vietnam elections than we have killed in our 2 1/2 years of bombing. It is difficult to get the American people to understand these things.

But I do want to talk instead of fight.

The President read a memo from a recent visitor to Hanoi who reported that there had been a hardening of Hanoi's position. The President also read a cable from Ambassador Bunker which said that the North Vietnamese today are much more confident of victory than they were two months ago.

Kosygin has asked them twice to negotiate. That is the reason why we asked Ambassador Thompson, our best man in Soviet affairs, to return to Moscow.

The problem is not here with your government. Every time we talk about the morality of our position and the faults with our government, it makes Hanoi think they will win in Washington what they want in Paris. I believe we are misleading Ho.

I can assure you of one thing. I would welcome anything to stop it.

You touch me deeply because you come here to search for an answer without any fanfare or announcements. I need your help, and I am open to your advice. We do not want to take over North Vietnam. Our objectives are limited. And I will go down any road which would bring us peace with honor.

SCIENTIST: Mr. President, I am glad you are taking your soft approach. I have just returned from a visit to France where I became very upset

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by French scientists who see us as having an imperialistic image.

THE PRESIDENT: The image distresses me too. I do not understand much about images as you can observe from my own.

SPOKESMAN: All of us share your view on the deep division which is in our country. These do encourage the North Vietnamese. You have proven to North Vietnam that they cannot win a military victory. They think they can win a political victory in this country. There is a question in our minds of what we can do to help reduce this division. We urge a careful consideration to flexible approaches. Even if a reduction in our operations would not bring us to a bargaining table it would let the people in this country know we have tried everything.

THE PRESIDENT: You are 110% right. I agree with every word you say.

SPOKESMAN: It is the problem of looking at alternatives that is tough. We worry about whether this country will hold on. We wonder why with a country of 200 people we can't find some more people to seek alternative approaches.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I get out every week to see other people besides Rusk, Rostow, and McNamara.

DEAN BUNTING OF RADCLIFFE: Mr. President, I must say after listening to you and to Secretary McNamara today that the alternatives seem even more difficult than they did before. And the solutions seem even less promising. We do want to know what we can do to help.

THE PRESIDENT: This country is big enough to do anything we want to do. But there are pickets who in the name of dissent won't even let McNamara get to his home and who threaten him when he is trying to vacation. If all of you can put the throttle on extremism in this country, it would help.

I am in deep trouble. But there has never been a major war when there hasn't been major trouble at home.

What you can try to do is to "cool it." Many people are being used in this country and are hurting the country perhaps without even knowing it.

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I make it a point to be informed and I am going to try to do what is right. It's knowing what is right that is important. We have got to find new ways, but I ask you what would you do if you were President tonight?

Would you do the following:

- (1) Would you pull out of Vietnam? Let me see the hands of those who think you would.

There was a comment, "Not this group. We believe it is in our interest to be there and not to pull out. We are 100% on this. None of us would pull out."

- (2) Who would bomb Haiphong harbor or Hanoi?

None would. There was 100% agreement.

- (3) Which of you would stop the bombing along the DMZ, in line of the position of our men?

None said they would.

One spokesman said there was an alternative to this, moving the men back out of range of the weapons and then bombing only certain segments of the north.

The meeting ended with all of the group thanking the President very much for taking such a long time out of his day to visit with them. They expressed their hope that they could be of help to the President, although they did not completely agree with our policy in Vietnam.

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