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FEBRUARY 10, 1968 - 3:17 p.m.

SENIOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISORS

Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
Clark Clifford

Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

9:15 PM SET

MEMORANDUM

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

February 12, 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of the President's meeting with the Senior Foreign Affairs Advisory Council on February 10, 1968, in the Mansion.

Those attending:

The President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
Clark Clifford
Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

The meeting began at 3:17 p.m. The meeting ended at 5:15 p.m.

Attachment

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Meeting Began: 3:17 p.m.
Meeting Ended: 5:15 p.m.

NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
WITH THE SENIOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
ADVISORY COUNCIL

In the Mansion
February 10, 1968

Secretary Rusk: The Korean Desk at State does not want Vance to go to Vietnam. They think it would dilute his mission to South Korea to go elsewhere.

The President: Is it true there are no nuclear weapons in Vietnam?

Secretary McNamara: It is true there are none there.

The President: Do you expect any more trouble on the nuclear matter?

George Christian: No, I think it will die down.

The President: How do you feel about Khesanh?

Secretary McNamara: There seems to be no alternative except to hold it and put in reinforcements. I would not send the 82nd airborne out there.

The President: Where is all this criticism of Westmoreland coming from?

Secretary McNamara: Not out of the Defense Department.

Secretary Rusk: I have heard no criticism of Westmoreland in the State Department.

Secretary McNamara: There is some difference between Westmoreland and Ambassador Lodge on search and destroy versus search and harass. Lodge feels that what we are doing is too costly and involves too many U.S. troops.

The President: What's causing the enemy to delay its attack against Khesanh?

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Secretary McNamara: The bombing affected their schedule.

The President: What about the cities?

Secretary McNamara: A number of them is threatened by small guerilla bands.

Secretary Rusk: I doubt if a second wave of attacks will be as great as the first.

The President: Should we just sit and wait?

Secretary McNamara: I think so.

Secretary Rusk: Westmoreland wants them to commit themselves before hitting them with our reinforcements. In that sense, Khesanh is bait.

The President: Does the use of tanks affect Westmoreland's defensive capability?

Secretary McNamara: No, Westmoreland did not expect the strength of attacks throughout the cities.

Because of it, he had to spread his deployment differently.

The President: What would Westmoreland want if he could have it?

Secretary McNamara: The 82nd and the Six-Ninths of a Marine Division.

The President: Don't you think it would be good to get these men on out there or nearby on Okinawa. Frankly, I am afraid to move the 82nd because of the possibility of civil disturbances here in the U. S.

Secretary McNamara: I do not think we should send the 82nd Airborne. I fear we are further involving the U.S. as a substitute for Vietnamese troops.

Secretary Rusk: I am worried about the ARVN taking six months to get back into shape.

The President: That worries me too.

Secretary McNamara: I believe it unwise for Paul Nitze to go to Vietnam. If he went, he would be called before the Congressional committee and would

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face press questioning. If Cy Vance goes to Vietnam, he doesn't have to say anything.

The President: Cy is the best equipped for this. He is precise, firm and positive.

Secretary McNamara: Cy would take a hardheaded view. He is a good reporter. He would bring back the views of our top people there and his own intelligent assessment.

The President: Should we increase the production of helicopters?

Secretary McNamara: Yes, we will increase the number.

I think we may want to move those 5 U.S. battalions out of the Delta. I was disappointed at the uses that we had to put U.S. troops to in Saigon. The ARVN should have been able to handle Saigon. We do not correct a situation by putting more U.S. troops in.

I think we should do 4 things:

1. Get the 50% back who were on TET leave.
2. Try to get the ARVN to perform better.
3. Get the Vietnamese to follow their decree and draft 19 year olds as we do here.
4. See where we can relieve men for duties more essential than those they are now performing (as in the Delta).

The President: What other recommendations do you have?

Secretary McNamara: The Chiefs are meeting Sunday and will be ready for their recommendations on Monday. I also have a group working on troop deployment. You will have a Wheeler plan and a McNamara plan.

Secretary Rusk: I can't find out where they say those 15,000 extra enemy troops came from. They say that these battalions came in between December and January.

The President: The Chiefs see a basic change in the strategy of the war.

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They say the enemy has escalated from guerilla tactics to more conventional warfare.

I asked the Generals last week about the necessity of defending Khesanh. They said it was necessary. I asked them about the security of Khesanh. They said they could defend it.

General Wheeler and all of them said it was necessary to defend it and it could be defended.

There seems to have been some movement in their position.

All I am asking is that we make sure that everything has been done. I do not want my advisors to shift from a position of sureness to a position of uncertainty. I don't want them to ask for something, not get it, and then have all of this placed on me.

I would supply Westmoreland with all he needs. Let's get him the 25,000. Senator Russell told me last night that the 82nd is all we have here. But he said he would not have Westmoreland asking for the 82nd and not supplying them.

Secretary McNamara: I am trying to devise a plan which will get you the men without the disastrous consequences of the action recommended by the JCS (call up and dispatch of the 82nd Airborne Division and the Sixth-Ninth of a Marine division).

The President: Senator Russell said we do not have anybody in the U.S. Army who compares with General Giap in guerilla warfare.

The President: That may be true.

Clark Clifford: I hope we do not have to ask for a completely new program. This is a bad time to do it. On one hand the military has said we had quite a victory out there last week. On the other hand, they now say that it was such a big victory that we need 120,000 more men (call-up of reserves).

I would much prefer that Khesanh get real rough and then provide more men than to put them out there now after all that had been told the American people.

The President: I think it would strike morale a death blow if we extended tours in Vietnam permanently. But we may want to let Congress know

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that all of the things the Viet Cong have done will cost a great deal more money.

Clark Clifford: All we have heard is about the preparation the North Vietnamese have made for the attack at Khesanh. I have a feeling that the North Vietnamese are going to do something different. I believe our people were surprised by the 24 attacks on the cities last week. God knows the South Vietnamese were surprised with half of their men on holiday. There may be a feint and a surprise coming up for us.

Secretary Rusk: One regiment of enemy troops was seen moving east of Khesanh this morning. This unit may hit somewhere other than Khesanh.

The President: But I have been told that both communications intelligence and captured documents show Khesanh as their target.

It may be that Giap knows we know this and then will hit us elsewhere.

Secretary McNamara: If I were Giap I would hit Kontumor Pleiku. This would be less costly in men for him.

I do not know the precise relative strength in the area, but I do know that we will pay a heavy price. We have lost 900 men in 10 days already.

Clark Clifford: With all the attention on Khesanh, with the population in disarray, Giap may want to keep Westmoreland and 20,000 troops tied down up north. This is a very difficult time and we must watch every possibility. I do not think we really know where the blows are going to come.

In addition, I am getting a few pains in my tail about the South Koreans. They should remember that we have kept 60,000 men and lost many thousands of American lives in defense of South Korea.

It just seems to me that South Korea should know that we are over there to help them. Somehow, it seems to them that they are helping us.

We must say, wait just a minute, we are there to help you and we have been helping you for over a decade.

The President: I told Cy Vance last night that Park must understand our problems. Cy must make it clear to him that this talk of pulling out of Vietnam would cause us to pull men out of South Korea.

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Secretary Rusk: When Walt was at the Policy Planning Council at State, I asked them then how does a great power like the U.S. avoid becoming a satellite of a small allied power, such as Korea.

The President: Senator Russell said we should not have Senator Fulbright and the Military Foreign Relations Committee down here. He also said we could not testify on television during war time. He said there is a big difference between Secretary Rusk's answering questions put to him by newsmen and answering questions on television asked by the members of Congress. It makes us look as though one branch of government is opposed to what the other is doing.

Clark Clifford: I do not like the idea of the President having to write Senator Fulbright a letter.

I think a dinner is better than a formal letter.

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