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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

TOP SECRETNATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, February 18, 1965

Cabinet Room, 5:20 p. m.

Participants: The President

The Vice President

State	Secretary Rusk Under Secretary Ball Ambassador Thompson Assistant Secretary Bundy Ambassador Unger
Defense	Secretary McNamara Deputy Secretary Vance Assistant Secretary McNaughton
JCS	General Wheeler
CIA	General Carter
Treasury	Secretary Dillon
USIA	Director Rowan
White House	McGeorge Bundy Chester L. Cooper

The President indicated that the purpose of the meeting was to review developments since the last meeting (February 8), and to up-date our information. He indicated that his statement to the National Industrial Conference Board on February 17 attempted to state U. S. goals in Vietnam. He reviewed these goals: we have

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NSC letter 10-24-80	
By DC/H	DATE, Date 8-18-82

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one major objective -- to save South Vietnam and to help the South Vietnamese to preserve their freedom. We seek no bases or territory there, and when we have responsible assurance that the terrorism has stopped, we will bring our troops home immediately; and until then, we will do everything we think wise to help the South Vietnamese do what is necessary. The President said that we must expect an increase in Viet Cong aggressive tactics and that we must recognize that our own responses are likely to increase as well. He wants to make it clear that the U.S. is going to continue its efforts to meet and stop this aggression. Our Mission in Saigon should have no doubts whatsoever as to U.S. intent and objectives.

Secretary McNamara briefed the Council on the increasing tempo of the conflict. The Saigon Mission and the GVN (Khanh) want to undertake attacks on certain targets in the southern part of North Vietnam, and he agreed this should be done.

Secretary Rusk pointed out that there were daily evidences of an increase in Viet Cong activity in the central and southern part of South Vietnam. He pointed to the Communist "war vessel" that was brought into a South Vietnam port. He said there may well be an increase in North Vietnamese forces in the northern part of South Vietnam. He agreed that strikes this weekend against the North should take place. Secretary Rusk went on to review the international reaction to our strikes. He said that those Asian countries that had a great stake in the security of the area (e.g., Korea, Thailand, Taiwan, Australia, UK, Philippines) are with us; some countries (e.g., France and Pakistan) are luke warm; some "unaligned" countries are flatly opposed.

The Secretary indicated his misgivings with ~~with~~ respect to an approach to the UN at this time. He doubted that a debate in the Security Council would be the best way to deal with the situation. The USSR is the only Communist country represented there, and would have a special responsibility to defend the DRV actions and thus might adopt a less forthcoming stance than it might in another forum. The Secretary felt that we should make our White Paper available as soon as possible. He felt the ICC may be able to play a useful role, but we are still investigating how best to use the ICC machinery.

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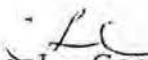
The Secretary felt that, in the course of the next week, it may be necessary to make another strong statement on our aims and objectives, stating that we will move our troops as soon as we know the aggression has stopped. He said there are many who think "negotiation" is a magic word, but felt it would be a mistake to indicate prematurely our desire to enter into negotiation; unless there was some prospect that negotiations would be meaningful, it would be a very dangerous situation. A negotiation that failed would indicate that we had taken the case to the higher court and it was unable to deal with it. This would be the worst possible situation.

The Secretary indicated that "political antennae" all over the world are waiting for signals that the Communists are ready to engage in meaningful negotiation. Thus far no significant signals have been received. It is extremely important, in this respect, that the GVN itself is ready to stand up against this aggression.

The President said that he would rather talk than fight, but nonetheless it was terribly important that the GVN not get the wrong impression that the U. S. is seeking negotiations prematurely. Under these circumstances Saigon might begin its own negotiations very quickly and without our knowledge or participation.

The President read the text of an outgoing message, from Secretary Rusk to Ambassador Bruce, which spelled out our proposed policy. He asked the members of the Council for their reaction. All agreed.

The meeting adjourned at 6:05.


Chester L. Cooper

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ATTENDANCE LIST FOR THE 549th NSC MEETING
FEBRUARY 18, 1965, AT 5:00 PM IN THE CABINET ROOM
OF THE WHITE HOUSE

The President of the United States, Presiding

The Vice President of the United States

CIA

General Marshall Carter, Acting Director

DEFENSE

Secretary Robert McNamara
Cyrus Vance, Deputy Secretary
John McNaughton, Assistant Secretary (ISA)

JCS

General Earle Wheeler, Chairman

STATE

Dean Rusk, Secretary
George Ball, Under Secretary
Llewellyn Thompson, Ambassador-at-Large
William Bundy, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs
Leonard Unger, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs

TREASURY

C. Douglas Dillon, Secretary

USIA

Carol T. Rowan, Director

WHITE HOUSE

McGeorge Bundy	Douglass Cater
George Reedy	Horace Busby
Bill Moyers	Jack Valenti
Bromley Smith	Chester Cooper

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WASHINGTON

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

February 18, 1965 - 5 P. M.

AGENDA

1. Recommendation on continuing air action
Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara
2. Recommendation on statement by Secretary Rusk and
presentation of evidence internationally
Secretary Rusk
3. Recommendation on diplomatic communication
Secretary Rusk