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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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April 4, 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Subject: 584th NSC Meeting, 1:00 pm, Wednesday, March 27, 1968

The President stated that he had asked General Abrams to join the meeting so that he and General Wheeler could report on the situation in Vietnam before the Council turned to the problem of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. He asked General Wheeler to summarize his report on his recent trip to Vietnam.

General Wheeler stated that the situation in Vietnam was very difficult to assess. The Vietnamese government had not been broken by the powerful VC/NVA attacks during the Tet offensive but had been "frozen" in a defensive posture. The reason for this was that the VC had established a stranglehold around the cities. General Westmoreland had told President Thieu that one could not afford to defend a city from the inside and had to go out after the enemy. Thieu, however, was hesitant to have his forces leave the cities since he felt the government simply could not afford another Tet offensive. However, Thieu was now beginning to push out again from the cities. For example, the current offensive around Saigon was not simply a US operation but was made up of 12 ARVN and 6 US batallions. Westmoreland told him that he believed the ARVN had in general performed well, had maintained high morale, and was now regaining the initiative. While he expected further hard fighting, Westmoreland had no fear of a general defeat. However, the enemy does have the capability of further local victories which can be blown up for propaganda purposes. Westmoreland estimates that the NVA can bring in two more divisions in the next 30 to 45 days and that there are now some 8,000 to 10,000 NVA troops coming down from North Vietnam. Khe Sanh appears to have served the NVA's purpose. Earlier there were two NVA divisions surrounding Khe Sanh with an additional division in reserve. Now one division has moved to the south and the reserve division has moved east. The enemy seems primarily interested now in Hue and Saigon, and Westmoreland believes that the enemy's near-term efforts will be to continue harassments and strangulation of these two cities. In conclusion, he stated that General Westmoreland had no concern that we would suffer a major defeat in South Vietnam.

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The President introduced General Abrams to the group and stated that he had been working closely with the ARVN for some time so that they will be in a better position to take care of themselves. He read excerpts from a memorandum from General Taylor commending General Abrams' excellent record as both a battlefield and staff officer. He then asked General Abrams to tell the group about the plans and problems of the ARVN, particularly with regard to the decision to draft 19- and 18-year-olds.

General Abrams stated that at General Westmoreland's request, he had been working for almost a year directly with the ARVN forces and had gotten to know most of the officers above the level of regimental commander and some of the regimental commanders as well. He felt that the ARVN, as well as the RF and PF, were continually gaining confidence in themselves. Some deficiencies had been revealed during the Tet offensive, but the general performance of the ARVN had been good -- exceeding the expectations of most Americans. The performance of only eight out of the 149 battalions was considered unsatisfactory. Thirty battalions distinguished themselves, and the remainder did very well. He noted that the first ARVN division took 10% casualties -- 30% in the rifle battalion -- but continued to fight. He recounted the story of an ARVN lieutenant who received a field promotion to captain as a result of his aggressive leadership in the recapture of Hue. An increase of 140,000 is now planned in the present ARVN force of around 600,000. They will now draft 19-year-olds and in June will begin the draft of 18-year-olds. He noted that the training centers were all back in operation but that the training job of this large increase is a major task which places a limit on how rapidly the forces can be expanded. He was confident, however, that the ARVN can achieve this force level objective. He reported that they are now trying to obtain from 4,000 to 6,000 additional officers and that a major source will be the commissioning of noncoms who distinguished themselves during the Tet offensive. With regard to new weapons, he noted that a major effort is being made to supply the ARVN with the M-16 rifle as quickly as possible. This program has been completed in I Corps and they are now moving ahead rapidly, particularly in the Highlands where the ARVN is fighting regular NVA units which have modern equipment. He noted the program to upgrade ARVN units with M-60 machine guns and grenade launches as well as a new mortar. There will be new equipment available by the time the 140,000 new recruits are trained. He reported that an effort must be made to also improve the RF and PF and that, pending availability of additional M-16 rifles, they would be supplied with M-2 automatic carbines as they were replaced in the regular ARVN forces with M-16 rifles.

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The President asked how the Korean forces had operated during the Tet offensive.

General Abrams replied that the Korean forces leave nothing to be desired. They have the finest officers in the junior grades that he had ever seen. This particularly pleased him since they had been trained in the schools that we had set up after the Korean War.

The President asked whether the ARVN forces would ever be as good as the Koreans which, he observed, were not considered very good at the beginning of the Korean War.

General Abrams replied that he saw no reason why the ARVN could not be just as good as the Koreans.

The President asked how the Australian troops have done.

General Abrams replied that the Australians had performed very well and that now that they had an additional battalion they had a large enough force to operate independently.

The President asked what the results of the Tet offensive had really been and what we could look forward to.

General Abrams stated that the Tet offensive had given a quantum jump to the improvement of the ARVN morale since the ARVN had met and beaten the best of the NVA forces. He observed that nothing you can do does more for a soldier's morale than to give them a victory. The morale of the ARVN is now at the highest point it has ever been. The morale of US soldiers has been good and continues to be so. He told a story of the Marine group on Hill 821 at Khe Sanh that ran up the flag every morning in a bugle ceremony in order to attract fire so that the enemy would use up its quota of shells against them for the day all at once. For the future, he expected more fighting in April. The enemy will apply all the pressure that he can.

The President asked whether he had enough troops for adequate protection.

General Abrams replied that, with the currently planned augmentation, he believed that the situation can be adequately handled.

The President thanked General Abrams and asked Amb. William Foster to discuss the status of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

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Amb. Foster reported that two weeks previously the US and Soviet Union had jointly submitted to the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee (ENDC) in Geneva identical drafts of a complete NPT. They had also agreed upon a draft resolution on security assurances for the UN Security Council. The US, USSR, and the UK had also agreed on essentially identical declarations that they would each make in connection with the Security Council resolution. He emphasized that the security assurances did not constitute a new commitment for the United States but rather gave promise of action by reaffirming our existing commitments under the UN Charter. He reported that the ENDC had now submitted to the UN its report forwarding the draft text of the treaty and Security Council resolution. A Special Session of the UNGA on the NPT will begin sometime between April 17 and 24. He noted that we still had problems and that India and Brazil had indicated their reservations about the treaty. He stated that we shared with the Soviet Union a desire to convey the feeling that the present draft was the text of the NPT and not simply a proposal subject to general amendments. At the same time, however, we did not wish to join the Soviet Union in an attempt to railroad the treaty through the Special Session of the UNGA. He believed that it was important to give everyone an opportunity to talk the issue out completely. If the treaty did not run into serious problems in the Special Session, it could then be opened for signature later this spring. He reported that Ambassadors Goldberg and Malik were working out the tactics for the Special Session, and that we were working on India, Brazil, the FRG, etc., through regular diplomatic channels in an attempt to overcome their reservations. There is no question that there would be an effort by some countries to delay action on the NPT in the Special Session by attempting to amend it, to return it to the ENDC for further consideration, or to defer it to the next session of the UNGA. He noted that if the Special Session goes well, we sign, and the Senate approves, we will then have to decide, on the basis of the existing situation, whether to ratify and deposit the treaty immediately or to defer this action. He noted that, even if we have problems in the UNGA, we could still open the treaty for signature since there would in any case be very large support for it.

Amb. Foster then raised the question as to what would happen after the NPT since it calls on the nuclear weapons states to negotiate "in good faith" toward nuclear disarmament. He noted that we had already made several major proposals -- the comprehensive test ban; cut-off of production of nuclear materials for weapons; and the freeze on offensive-defensive strategic weapons systems. A new proposal is now being considered within the Government concerning the control of the seabed. In this connection,

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the Soviet Union the previous week had formally made a proposal to prohibit use of the seabed for military purposes beyond the 12-mile limit. He thought therefore that we should quickly develop a forthcoming position on this issue. He noted that our policy was to support a comprehensive test ban provided there was adequate on-site inspection and that we had a forthcoming position on the nuclear cut-off. As for the freeze on offensive-defensive strategic systems, we were still waiting for a Soviet response.

In response to the President's question as to his views on the status of the NPT, Under Secretary Katzenbach stated that he had nothing specific to add except the thought that bad things happen quickly and good things happen much more slowly. He thought that, while the prospects for the NPT were favorable, there were still many problems ahead.

Amb. Goldberg stated that the NPT would be the most momentous achievement for peace since the Limited Test Ban Treaty. The President and Amb. Foster deserve the most credit for this accomplishment. The full significance and effect of the treaty had not yet fully sunk in with the public. With regard to the scenario, he stated that it now looked as though the Special Session would begin on April 24 although we had originally wanted to meet earlier. He would be conferring with the Soviets on tactics during the next few days. In general, it appeared we believed in a softer sell than the Soviets. There were clearly problem spots such as Italy; however, he thought these problems could be resolved. He thought the biggest problem would be the effort by opponents to delay action on the treaty until after the caucus of the non-nuclear states in August so that the debate could be resumed in the next session of the UNGA next September. With regard to the location of the signing, he favored independent signing in the three capitals -- Washington, London, and Moscow. With regard to follow-on measures, he noted that the seabed problem was a very complex, sensitive subject. He would propose to send it back to the ENDC for full debate to avoid any premature commitments in the Special Session of the UNGA. He stated that while he was not as optimistic about the outcome of the NPT as Amb. Foster, he thought it could be accomplished but emphasized that this would require hard work. He estimated that the Special Session would last about five weeks. If the treaty were then opened for signature, there would still be time to permit its submission to the Senate before adjournment.

The President asked what the status of the seabed proposal actually was.

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Amb. Foster replied that ACDA was now circulating a specific proposal at the working level and that a final version would shortly be sent to the Committee of Principals. He agreed that the ENDC was the right forum. He observed that the introduction of this new proposal would take some of the pressure off of us on the comprehensive test ban issue.

The President asked about India's position on the NPT.

Amb. Foster replied that the measure was now before the Indian Cabinet and had not yet been decided. In the end, however, he believed that India may well sign. He noted that arrangements had been made for Dr. Jerome Wiesner to meet in Geneva with Dr. Sarabhai, head of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission, who has emerged as the principal Indian opponent of the NPT, in order to try to persuade him to modify his views.

Amb. Goldberg said he thought the Indian problem would be more difficult than this and he had encountered outright opposition from their representatives in New York.

The President asked what other countries presented problems.

Amb. Foster replied that Italy had been quite difficult. However, the Italian Parliament was definitely in favor of the NPT and it would be difficult for the Italian government to oppose it. Brazil opposes the treaty on the grounds that it wants to be able to develop independently nuclear explosives for peaceful purposes in order to help its economy. He stated, however, that such an exception would completely undermine the treaty since peaceful nuclear explosives suitable for peaceful purposes were equivalent to the most advanced nuclear weapons. He noted that Brazil's position might change since some strong counterforces were developing there on this issue. With regard to the FRG, he was very hopeful that they would support the treaty. He noted that in the course of the long negotiations with our allies the FRG had written half of the treaty.

The President expressed his pleasure with the success that had been achieved so far on the NPT and congratulated Ambassadors Foster and Fisher for their accomplishments. He then adjourned the meeting.

*Spurgeon M. Keeny, Jr.*  
Spurgeon M. Keeny, Jr.

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LIST OF ATTENDEES, NSC MEETING

March 27, 1968, Wednesday, 1:00 P. M.

Vice President Humphrey

Under Secretary Katzenbach  
Ambassador Goldberg

Secretary of Defense Clifford  
Deputy Secretary Nitze

Secretary of Treasury Fowler

CIA Director Helms

JCS Chairman Wheeler

General Abrams

USIA Director Marks

OEP Director Daniel

AEC Chairman Seaborg

ACDA Director Foster  
Deputy Director Fisher

Donald Hornig  
Tom Johnson  
Walt Rostow  
Spurgeon Keenly  
Bromley Smith

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