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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5

NSC Memo, 1/30/95, State Dept. Guidelines

By WJG, NARA, Date 11-18-99

December 18, 1965

Meeting in Cabinet Room

Present: The President, Rusk, McNamara, Bundy, Clifford,
Ball, Alex Johnson, Abe Fortas, Jack Valenti

Subject: Possible bombing pause in North Vietnam

Time : 12:35 p.m.

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Amateur excursions into diplomacy can cost you greatly. But having to reply to it, it destroyed its effectiveness. We can't conduct negotiations...

(Guard these papers we are reading. We simply cannot allow this information to get out. I had a conversation with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff -- and I can understand what McNamara is living with -- he gave me the reasons why the Chiefs are against a cease-fire and a pause -- it almost makes it impossible to attack...)

(I would treat missions without mentioning or pointing up. After the fact, it is alright but we cannot announce their schedule as a ~~press mention~~. It would get ~~nowhere~~.)
peace mission

The military say a month's ~~pause~~ ^{undo} would ~~undo~~ all we've done.

McNamara: That's baloney -- and I can prove it.

President: I don't think so. I disagree. I think it contains serious military risks. It is inaccurate to say suspension of bombing carries no military risk.

Bundy and McNamara: We can resume bombing at any time.

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Ball: Wouldn't it be better to do it before Congress comes back?

President: Incidentally, do we want a personal State of the Union message? Clark, I want you to think about this. My inclination is not to speak in person. We wrote an 8-year program in our first State of the Union message. We've got all this the first year.

McCormack thinks personal delivery will help elect the Congress. I don't agree.

Rusk: I disagree. If you didn't, you would be giving up your leadership, here and abroad. I do have objection to a 9 p.m. appearance.

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(Fortas, Rusk, Clifford all intensely in favor of personal delivery.)

(After reading the position paper on a pause)

It rankles me that we have to prove again to Congress we are striving for peace. We've done that again and again.

Rusk: It's "What have you done for me lately?"

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Rusk: The UK, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, Korea, Canada, India, Japan, the Philippines. We need to tell them something within 36 hours.

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Rusk: First, there is the underlying question of the American people. They are isolationists at heart. (I am) convinced the people will do what has to be done in a war situation if they are convinced there is no alternative. You must think about the morale of the American people if the other side keeps pushing.

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President: They are pretty good at that, aren't they?

Rusk: If there is a chance Russia would take advantage of a suspension to start a movement toward peace, it is good. If it fails,...

(I am) influenced by the fact Russia and Iron Curtain countries acted in India-Pakistan crisis.

Also they don't want China policy to win. Also, they don't want a confrontation with the United States over Southeast Asia policy.

If it moves to the U.S. and China directly engaged, they have a deadly problem. This worries them. This ought to be clarified. We may get this clarified on the 3rd day like the last time.

A minor point (it would) make sure the world knows the U.S. is not the obstacle to peace. Those who support us will find it easy to support us.

President: From a propaganda point, there is a long shot chance. First, the Russians owe us something; second, it gives supporters reasons to go with the U.S.

Rusk: ^{along} Possibility of trap -- parlay pause into unilateral pause.

President: Do we eliminate this by keeping the pause on an indefinite time limit?

Rusk: Right.

Another concern is a pause that fails. It will bring pressure to go all out to get it settled.

President: That is the most dangerous aspect. Don't we know a pause will fail? If we are in worse shape, then, won't we be bringing a deadly crisis on ourselves? The Republicans are looking for an exit. When we suffer reverses, it will be attributable to this. The support we have will be weak as dishwater.

Rusk: The answer to Dirksen is that no real settlement came from Korea... They allowed North Viet-Nam to become communist.

President: Bob?

McNamara: The Soviets have not applied all the pressure they could.

President: Have they ever applied pressure?

Rusk: Yes. During the first pause, they said they didn't have time.

McNamara: Our first pause was a propaganda effort. It was a propaganda effort -- not for the Soviets to help.

Rusk: Another indication is that the Russians have waged a great struggle against China.

President: Do we gain anything by doing this on the heels of the Italian move?

Rusk: There is some disagreement in the timing. (One) the hard-liners say ~~we~~ paused in the face of Hanoi's intransigence. (Two) the leftwing says you are pausing because you don't believe anything will happen.

McNamara: My point is they haven't made all the effort they are capable of.

President: How do you know that? Have they talked with you?

McNamara: No. No contacts. This comes from State.

This pause will give us leverage on them. It stops them from precipitous action against us -- such as an amphibious landing. Such Russian action is less likely if we pause.

I think there is some movement from the DRV. We don't really understand the DRV reactions. We don't really know. We are out of communication. (There is) danger because of this. (There is a) bare chance this pause will help them move toward us.

President: What does Thompson say about the Russians?

Ball: It would relieve them of intense pressure on response to our actions. (There is) more danger of Russian response than Chinese response. So we must push them into a corner.

Rusk: Suppose the Russians were trying to avoid a confrontation with the U.S.? What are those Americans up to?

(The President left the room to take a phone call at 1:40. He re-entered at 1:50 p.m.)

Bundy: We don't think you should contact Ford of the House of Representatives. He will denounce us.

(The President did not answer.)

McNamara: 1. The Soviets have not applied all the pressure they are capable of.

2. Action stops Russians from responding as forcefully to our attacks...

3. North Viet-Nam might make a favorable movement. We don't know enough of their reactions to judge.

4. Suspension of bombing will widen the gap between the Russians and Chinese.

5. Strong feeling of American public that Government peace efforts have been superficial and inadequate.

6. Military solution to problem is not certain -- one out of three or one in two. Ultimately we must find solution, we must finally find a diplomatic solution.

President: Then, no matter what we do in military (field) there is no sure victory.

McNamara: That's right. We have been too optimistic. One in three or two in three is my estimate.

Rusk: I'm more optimistic, but I can't prove it.

McNamara: I'm saying: we may not find a military solution. We need to explore other means. It is impossible to negotiate a settlement we find acceptable.

Rusk: I don't agree. The other side knows South Viet-Nam is not going to negotiate on uneven terms.

McNamara: Our military action approach is an unacceptable way to a successful conclusion.

Ball: What you are saying is, they quit and come to the conference table?

McNamara: Right. This seems a contradiction. I come to you for a huge increase in Viet-Nam -- 400,000 men. But at the same time it may lead to escalation and undesirable results. I suggest we look now at other alternatives.

1. Military advantage to North Viet-Nam's infiltration. I don't think it is serious -- small advantage to North Viet-Nam.

2. Possibility North Viet-Nam will interpret a pause as a sign of weakness.

3. May lead to trouble with Lodge and South Viet-Nam. It doesn't make any difference what or who is in South Viet-Nam -- don't worry about them.

Lodge is a great admirer of the President. He will act like a soldier.

President: I differ with you. I think Lodge and the South Vietnamese government are problems. We've had enough governments out there. We must give thought to where the St. Louis Post-Despatch episode leads to.

Ask Dobrynin in the light of North Vietnamese reaction where are we?

Also Mansfield -- he is arriving with a full report.

McNamara: Pressure for escalation after suspension. Don't believe it will be a major problem. This pressure is only in terms of the North.

Republicans don't dare suggest we bomb cities.

P.O.L.? I will recommend we bomb them too.

Mine Haiphong Harbor? I will suggest this later myself. Three to six months from now we will have to do this. But danger is Russian reaction. It will be less if we have pause.

Rusk: Think you underestimate problem we face with South Viet-Nam.

McNamara: Find it inconceivable that is so.

Greatest danger is right in this room. Simply cannot discuss this with your wife. I can see stories about this -- and I am embarrassed. Please let us check ourselves and discuss with no human being.

(Meeting adjourned for lunch at 2:20 p.m. Meeting resumed at 3:05).

Bundy: For the pause. Share McNamara view that settlement must be political. This will be form of diplomatic initiative.

President: I'm not in a position to quote Wheeler on pros or cons of pause. He is a good soldier and will follow Commander-in-Chief. Don't think his views are emotional. He is loyal to McNamara and me -- -- but has convictions....point up systematically his views.

McNamara: Whatever decision you make, Wheeler will follow.

Bundy: If we are going to do a pause, I'd much rather have done it before the Congress comes back.

Fortas: Divide into two parts:

1. Military effects.
2. Psychological and political aspects.

Political effects on this country:

(1) Case is not proven. Believe this action will be good -- if it results in some kind of conference or suspension of hostilities.

Think public reaction will be negative -- showing uncertainty. Always think there is possibility of error in assessing public opinion. What they really want is cessation of hostilities. Not very much point in responding to manifestation of public opinion that says "you're not doing enough".

Anytime there is evidence of lack of certainty on the government's part, it leads to negative thinking in the public mind. It will cause people to worry about depth of conviction in government objective.

Negative on net balance.

~~Regarding~~ ^{Real} question -- on whether this action should be taken -- is whether this action results in actual accomplishment.

As I understand ^{it}, this action will not be done with pre-arrangement with Russians. This is an action ambivalent and ambiguous. We use the Christmas season -- and b, that fact and presentation we are diluting the effort in its hoped-for psychological and political results. Also diluting effect on Russians -- and any bringing about of peace negotiations.

Concerned as to what happens if this fails.

If failure, we won't get credit for it. There will be renewed pressure for drastic action. We'll have obstacles to

negotiations because of failure of major and spectacular effort.

President: What do you think? What would be the value?

Fortas: If we could do this by pre-arrangement with the Russians: "If we would finally consider a pause, would this give you an opportunity to get the VC to the conference table?"

President: We've already done this with the Russians.

Bundy: We don't think we can put them in a corner. The paper to the Russians is drafted carefully to go as far as we can with the Russians.

Rusk: We've tried to engage the Soviets in the Viet-Nam settlement ~~but~~ Moscow can't deliver Hanoi.

Fortas: This venture depends on the Russians using our actions for some purpose with North Viet-Nam. All I do is raise the question as to whether we have adequate reason for assumption.

Ball: This assumption is not based on one conversation, but on a number of them. Very often the means used by communists is not direct. Also this assumption is based on direct conversation with the Soviets. If we paused, the Soviets tell us they will do the best they can (based on twenty or more conversations).

Fortas: There is danger Hanoi would ^{great} a pause as ^{visible} ~~feasible~~ evidence that protests have had effect on the U.S. Government.

Ball: The thing that offsets that is heavy deployment in the South.

Alex Johnson: We can't have it said by Hanoi and China that Russia is conspiring with the United States.

Clifford: Arguments for pause are well presented. Even if I accepted them, I still feel deep concern over this move.

1. Tried to figure out the circumstance under which North Viet-Nam would talk. Only their belief they are not going to win the war in South Viet-Nam. I don't believe they are at that stage now. I think they believe they are not losing. They are sending large numbers of men down. They have the example of the French before them. They believe that ultimately the United States will tire of this and go home and North Viet-Nam will prevail. Until they know they're not going to win the war, they will not talk and the Russians cannot convince them.

2. Believe the President and the government have talked enough about peace. Don't believe any more talk will do any good.

Any objective citizen knows the government's position. Talk of peace is interpreted as a sign of weakness.

This pause would encourage North Viet-Nam -- take this to be a step backward, in response to U.S. protest opinion and world opinion.

Anything that hinders the North Viet-Nam^{all} from figuring they can't win hinders the close of the war.

3. When the time comes to resume (and it will resume because chances are only one in twenty or one in fifty) those who want peace at any price, who want us to get out are that we not resume. They will urge enough events to happen to encourage the pause to go on.

4. If you accept the hypothesis that there is no chance of success, others will know it too. And I don't like the President to take a posture that is clearly unproductive. Might end up being viewed as a gimmick. Timing during Christmas is unfortunate.

5. Don't believe Viet-Nam is going to be settled publicly. Humphrey and Harriman publicized trips will not settle anything. Only when Hanoi feels nothing to be gained by further fighting is this war going to end.

6. If Soviets believe it is to their best interest to take favorable steps, they can do it at any time. Simply because bombing is going on will not stop them from intervening.

7. Time might come when pause would be valuable -- if we thought there was a chance it would be successful, then and only then would I do it.

Dall: Think we make a mistake in feeling Hanoi has freedom of action. They can no more give up this war alone than we would let Saigon fail. It's what the communist powers believe is the right course. The bombing immobilizes China and the USSR.

McNamara: Should we pursue military estimate of 50-50 chance of victory -- or what should we do?

Rusk: In carrying the political battle, I need something more than we have at the present time. We need to make clear that the United States is honorable and has been given no alternative. We strengthen our position by proving we want peace.

Fortas: Seems to me you have already made your case for peace. Perhaps it looks different on the inside than it does on the outside.

McNamara: If we put in 400,000 men, what will they do? They will match us. We are going to be bombing assets of North

Viet-Nam dearer to them than the ones we are bombing. China is beginning to ready planes to meet us in the skies. It appears that MIGs are being introduced into North Viet-Nam. They are getting ready for escalation -- and will call on Russia. They don't want to confront us in Vietnam -- they want a way out.

Fortas: The way we are doing it is too little to get the Soviets to do anything.

Ball: But North Viet-Nam would know a diplomatic offensive is going on on behalf of the Russians. If North Viet-Nam says "no" to the Soviets, they have a way out when North Viet-Nam calls on them for more arms and men.

President: Dean, have you given any thought to me going to the UN?

Rusk: Yes. It is related to whether or not you envisage doing the pause. If you are going up to greet and thank the UN on their last day -- a short statement -- recount the main elements of our policy -- also try to look beyond Viet-Nam -- and the hopes of mankind all over the world -- education, health and peace -- that kind of twenty minute visit would be worthwhile. It would be particularly worthwhile if you do the pause.

McNamara: No (so sure if you are not going to pause. Want to see the speech before final decision.

President: Anything further to be gained ^{between} the Secretary or Goldberg and the Russians -- on the basis: we will do this if you will follow through? Tell them: Here's what we want to do if you will acknowledge that you will do something.

Bundy: You're never going to be in a position to be in partnership with the Russians. They will always deny being in league with a capitalistic power.

Rusk: Moscow, Poland and Hungary have been in touch with Hanoi. We have never heard from Poland and Hungary.

If we don't do this, have we any other diplomatic moves we can make -- any approaches with any other government?

(Silence for a few minutes)

Rusk: We could take it to the Security Council if the Russians didn't veto and ask the Secretary General to go to Hanoi. We could press the Hungarian channel pretty hard -- they are in touch with Moscow.

I worry about bringing this to the assembly in view of the Rhodesia question.

We could continue these discussions of which we have had a lot.

President: Did Wilson say anything about this. I don't know.
Rusk: He was very relaxed about it.

President: He asked me about the 12-hour truce.

Rusk: That should be left to local commanders. It's not very long.

President: Let's outline all other courses and see them

Ball: We have just about exhausted ~~three~~ ^{this party} contacts based on what we have given them about our position.

President: But the Viet Cong haven't done anything. They get a lot of hay by just talking.

Bundy: If we had a newspaper in Hanoi not under their control, we could do more (laughter).

Down the road there are a lot of areas we haven't *done* -- such as formulas on when they shoot and we shoot back as we move around Vietnam.

We could plow a straight furrow during winter and spring and clean out the South -- and put the onus of continued fighting on them.

I would like to get the diplomatic experience of this pause. We have a lot of diplomatic maneuvering to do.

Rusk: One of the pitfalls is that a new situation can always turn out different. For example, lifting of the Berlin blockade came as a surprise. In the Pusan peninsula, we thought we couldn't hang on -- and we did.

I have a feeling that the other side is not that tough -- and it does not follow in a year or two we won't be in the far more favorable position. I think the other side is hurting just as we are hurting.

Clifford: We could make quite a case that our stand is producing good results by preventing the Viet Cong from achieving their objective. Perhaps we can connect beneficial events in Indonesia with our presence in Viet-Nam. At heart we are preventing a communist takeover in Viet-Nam and that is to our credit.

Rusk: I presume you don't think we can put a greatly increased offensive? (to McNamara)

McNamara: No. We are increasing but so are the Viet Cong. We have 34 U.S. battalions plus 7 more soon, plus 10 Australian and others. South Viet-Nam has 600,000 men. The Viet Cong have 240,000 (probably two or three North Vietnamese divisions -- and increasing). By the end of January, 230,000 U.S. and others.

President: What do you think we ought to do if we don't pause, Bob?

McNamara: As a minimum, carry on the military buildup.

Study the possibility of a ceasefire, which I would recommend in a few months, whether as a propaganda device or a military standstill.

President: Any solid information of increasing of North Vietnamese activities?

McNamara: Stepped-up infiltration to 1500 a month through Laos. Soon up to 4,000 a month -- this has not been proved, however. About a year ago they began bringing in regular troops instead of cadres. About nine regiments of regulars are there. They have substantially expanded facilities.

Fortas: What would the Viet Cong propose in this 12-hour truce?

Alex Johnson: They said that soldiers without arms would not be attacked for 12 hours.

Fortas: If we are concerned about public opinion, this is something we ought to consider carefully. This would be capable of producing an adverse reaction in this country.

President: Mac, would you undertake to lay out a speech for Tuesday?

Dean, would you lay out alternatives available to us?

Alex, do you have any strong views. If you were President what would you do?

Alex Johnson: I'd take the pause -- if for no other reason than to engage the Russians.

President: Couldn't we engage them by saying we are ready to stop if the Viet Cong are?

Alex Johnson: No, I don't think we can without a bombing pause.

President: What troubles me more is their doubt as to our will to see this thing through.

What problems do we get into if we don't bomb on Christmas -- and tell the Russians what we are going -- and that we might do more?

You say the Russians won't and can't do any more unless we stop bombing. And yet they probably won't do anything.

Meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.

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(I am) influenced by the fact Russia and Iron Curtain countries acted in India-Pakistan crisis.

-- Also they don't want China policy to win. Also, they don't want a confrontation with the United States over Southeast Asia policy.

If it moves to the U.S. and China directly engaged, they have a deadly problem. This worries them. This ought to be clarified. We may get this clarified on the 3rd day like the last time.

A minor point (it would) make sure the world knows the U.S. is not the obstacle to peace. Those who support us will find it easy to support us.

President: From a propaganda point, there is a long shot chance. First, the Russians owe us something; second, it gives supporters reasons to go with the U.S.

Rusk: ^{along} Possibility of trap -- parlay pause into unilateral pause.

President: Do we eliminate this by keeping the pause on an indefinite time limit?

Rusk: Right.

Another concern is a pause that fails. It will bring pressure to go all out to get it settled.

President: That is the most dangerous aspect. Don't we know a pause will fail? If we are in worse shape, then, won't we be bringing a deadly crisis on ourselves? The Republicans are looking for an exit. When we suffer reverses, it will be attributable to this. The support we have will be weak as dishwater.

Rusk: The answer to Dirksen is that no real settlement came from Korea... They allowed North Viet-Nam to become communist.

President: Bob?

McNamara: The Soviets have not applied all the pressure they could.

President: Have they ever applied pressure?

Rusk: Yes. During the first pause, they said they didn't have time.

McNamara: Our first pause was a propaganda effort. It was a propaganda effort - not for the Soviets to help.

Rusk: Another indication is that the Russians have waged a great struggle against China.

President: Do we gain anything by doing this on the heels of the Italian move?

Rusk: There is some disagreement in the timing. (One) the hard-liners say we paused in the face of Hanoi's intransigence. (Two) the leftwing says you are pausing because you don't believe anything will happen.

McNamara: My point is they haven't made all the effort they are capable of.

President: How do you know that? Have they talked with you?

McNamara: No. No contacts. This comes from State.

This pause will give us leverage on them. It stops them from precipitous action against us -- such as an amphibious landing. Such Russian action is less likely if we pause.

I think there is some movement from the DRV. We don't really understand the DRV reactions. We don't really know. We are out of communication. (There is) danger because of this. (There is a) bare chance this pause will help them move toward us.

President: What does Thompson say about the Russians?

Ball: It would relieve them of intense pressure on response to our actions. (There is) more danger of Russian response than Chinese response. So we must push them into a corner.

Rusk: Suppose the Russians were trying to avoid a confrontation with the U.S.? What are those Americans up to?

(The President left the room to take a phone call at 1:40. He re-entered at 1:50 p.m.)

Bundy: We don't think you should contact Ford of the House of Representatives. He will denounce us.

(The President did not answer.)

McNamara: 1. The Soviets have not applied all the pressure they are capable of.

2. Action stops Russians from responding as forcefully to our attacks...

3. North Viet-Nam might make a favorable movement. We don't know enough of their reactions to judge.

4. Suspension of bombings will widen the gap between the Russians and Chinese.

5. Strong feeling of American public that Government peace efforts have been superficial and inadequate.

6. Military solution to problem is not certain -- one out of three or one in two. Ultimately we must find solution, we must finally find a diplomatic solution.

President: Then, no matter what we do in military (field) there is no sure victory.

McNamara: That's right. We have been too optimistic. One in three or two in three is my estimate.

Rusk: I'm more optimistic but I can't prove it.

McNamara: I'm saying: we may not find a military solution. We need to explore other means. It is impossible to negotiate a settlement we find acceptable.

Rusk: I don't agree. The other side knows South Viet-Nam is not going to negotiate on uneven terms.

McNamara: Our military action approach is an unacceptable way to a successful conclusion.

Ball: What you are saying is, they quit and come to the conference table?

McNamara: Right. This seems a contradiction. I come to you for a huge increase in Viet-Nam -- 400,000 men. But at the same time it may lead to escalation and undesirable results. I suggest we look now at other alternatives.

1. Military advantage to North Viet-Nam's infiltration. I don't think it is serious -- small advantage to North Viet-Nam.
2. Possibility North Viet-Nam will interpret a pause as a sign of weakness.
3. May lead to trouble with Lodge and South Viet-Nam. It doesn't make any difference what or who is in South Viet-Nam -- don't worry about them.

Lodge is a great admirer of the President. He will act like a soldier.

President: I differ with you. I think Lodge and the South Vietnamese government are problems. We've had enough governments out there. We must give thought to where the St. Louis Post-Despatch episode leads to.

Ask Dobrynin in the light of North Vietnamese reaction where are we?

Also Mansfield -- he is arriving with a full report.

McNamara: Pressure for escalation after suspension. Don't believe it will be a major problem. This pressure is only in terms of the North.

Republicans don't dare suggest we bomb cities.

P.O.L.? I will recommend we bomb them too.

Mine Haiphong Harbor? I will suggest this later myself. Three to six months from now we will have to do this. Bpt danger is Russian reaction. It will be less if we have pause.

Rusk: Think you underestimate problem we face with South Viet-Nam.

McNamara: Find it inconceivable that is so.

Greatest danger is right in this room. Simply cannot discuss this with your wife. I can see stories about this -- and I am embarrassed. Please let us check ourselves and discuss with no human being.

(Meeting adjourned for lunch at 2:20 p.m. Meeting resumed at 3:05).

Bundy: For the pause. Share McNamara view that settlement must be political. This will be form of diplomatic initiative.

President: I'm not in a position to quote Wheeler on pros or cons of pause. He is a good soldier and will follow Commander-in-Chief. Don't think his views are emotional. He is loyal to McNamara and me -- -- but has convictions....point up systematically his views.

McNamara: Whatever decision you make, Wheeler will follow.

Bundy: If we are going to do a pause, I'd much rather have done it before the Congress comes back.

Fortas: Divide into two parts:

1. Military effects.
2. Psychological and political aspects.

Political effects on this country:

(1) Case is not proven. Believe this action will be good -- if it results in some kind of conference or suspension of hostilities.

Think public reaction will be negative -- showing uncertainty. Always think there is possibility of error in assessing public opinion. What they really want is cessation of hostilities. Not very much point in responding to manifestation of public opinion that says "you're not doing enough".

Anytime there is evidence of lack of certainty on the government's part, it leads to negative thinking in the public mind. It will cause people to worry about depth of conviction in government objective.

Negative on net balance.

~~Regarding~~ ^{Real} question on whether this action should be taken -- is whether this action results in actual accomplishment.

As I understand ^{it}, this action will not be done with pre-arrangement with Russians. This is an action ambivalent and ambiguous. We use the Christmas season -- and by that fact and presentation we are diluting the effort in its hoped-for psychological and political results. Also diluting effect on Russians -- and any bringing about of peace negotiations.

Concerned as to what happens if this fails.

If failure, we won't get credit for it. There will be renewed pressure for drastic action. We'll have obstacles to

negotiations because of failure of major and spectacular effort.

President: What do you think? What would be the value?

Fortas: If we could do this by pre-arrangement with the Russians: If we would finally consider a pause, would this give you an opportunity to get the VC to the conference table?"

President: We've already done this with the Russians.

Bundy: We don't think we can put them in a corner. The paper to the Russians is drafted carefully to go as far as we can with the Russians.

Rusk: We've tried to engage the Soviets in the Viet-Nam settlement ~~At~~ Moscow can't deliver Hanoi.

Fortas: This venture depends on the Russians using our actions for some purpose with North Viet-Nam. All I do is raise the question as to whether we have adequate reason for assumption.

Ball: This assumption is not based on one conversation, but on a number of them. Very often the means used by communists is not direct. Also this assumption is based on direct conversation with the Soviets. If we paused, the Soviets tell us they will do the best they can (based on twenty or more conversations).

Fortas: There is danger Hanoi would ^{great} a pause as ^{visible} ~~feasible~~ evidence that protests have had effect on the U.S. Government.

Ball: The thing that offsets that is heavy deployment in the South.

Alex Johnson: We can't have it said by Hanoi and China that Russia is conspiring with the United States.

Clifford: Arguments for pause are well presented. Even if I accepted them, I still feel deep concern over this move.

1. Tried to figure out the circumstance under which North Viet-Nam would talk. Only their belief they are not going to win the war in South Viet-Nam I don't believe they are at that stage now. I think they believe they are not losing. They are sending large numbers of men down. They have the example of the French before them. They believe that ultimately the United States will tire of this and go home and North Viet-Nam will prevail. Until they know they're not going to win the war, they will not talk and the Russians cannot convince them.

2. Believe the President and the government have talked enough about peace. Don't believe any more talk will do any good.

Any objective citizen knows the government's position. Talk of peace is interpreted as a sign of weakness.

This pause would encourage North Viet-Nam -- take this to be a step backward, in response to U.S. protest opinion and world opinion.

Anything that hinders the North Viet-Nam^{all} from figuring they can't win hinders the close of the war.

3. When the time comes to resume (and it will resume because chances are only one in twenty or one in fifty) those who want peace at any price, who want us to get out are that we not resume. They will urge enough events to happen to encourage the pause to go on.

4. If you accept the hypothesis that there is no chance of success, others will know it too. And I don't like the President to take a posture that is clearly unproductive. Might end up being viewed as a gimmick. Timing during Christmas is unfortunate.

5. Don't believe Viet-Nam is going to be settled publicly. Humphrey and Harriman publicized trips will not settle anything. Only when Hanoi feels nothing to be gained by further fighting is this war going to end.

6. If Soviets believe it is to their best interest to take favorable steps, they can do it at any time. Simply because bombing is going on will not stop them from intervening.

7. Time might come when pause would be valuable -- if we thought there was a chance it would be successful, then and only then would I do it.

Ball: Think we make a mistake in feeling Hanoi has freedom of action. They can no more give up this war alone than we would let Saigon fail. It's what the communist powers believe is the right course. The bombing immobilizes China and the USSR.

McNamara: Should we pursue military estimate of 50-50 chance of victory -- or what should we do?

Rusk: In carrying the political battle, I need something more than we have at the present time. We need to make clear that the United States is honorable and has been given no alternative. We strengthen our position by proving we want peace.

Fortas: Seems to me you have already made your case for peace. perhaps it looks different on the inside than it does on the outside.

McNamara: If we put in 400,000 men, what will they do? They will ^{match} us. We are going to be bombing assets of North

Viet-Nam dearer to them than the ones we are bombing. China is beginning to ready planes to meet us in the skies. It appears that MIGs are being introduced into North Viet-Nam. They are getting ready for escalation -- and will call on Russia. They don't want to confront us in Vietnam -- they want a way out.

Fortas: The way we are doing it is too little to get the Soviets to do anything.

Ball: But North Viet-Nam would know a diplomatic offensive is going on on behalf of the Russians. If North Viet-Nam says "no" to the Soviets, they have a way out when North Viet-Nam calls on them for more arms and men.

President: Dean, have you given any thought to me going to the UN?

Rusk: Yes. It is related to whether or not you envisage doing the pause. If you are going up to greet and thank the UN on their last day -- a short statement -- recount the main elements of our policy -- also try to look beyond Viet-Nam -- and the hopes of mankind all over the world -- education, health and peace -- that kind of twenty minute visit would be worthwhile. It would be particularly worthwhile if you do the pause.

McNamara: No, so sure if you are not going to pause. Want to see the speech before final decision.

President: Anything further to be gained ^{between} the Secretary or Goldberg and the Russians -- on the basis: we will do this if you will follow through? Tell them: Here's what we want to do if you will acknowledge that you will do something.

Bundy: You're never going to be in a position to be in partnership with the Russians. They will always deny being in league with a capitalistic power.

Rusk: Moscow, Poland and Hungary have been in touch with Hanoi. We have never heard from Poland and Hungary.

If we don't do this, have we any other diplomatic moves we can make -- any approaches with any other government?

(Silence for a few minutes)

Rusk: We could take it to the Security Council if the Russians didn't veto and ask the Secretary General to go to Hanoi. We could press the Hungarian channel pretty hard -- they are in touch with Moscow.

I worry about bringing this to the assembly in view of the Rhodesia question.

We could continue these discussions of which we have had a lot.

President: Did Wilson say anything about this? I don't know.

Rusk: He was very relaxed about it.

President: He asked me about the 12-hour truce.

Rusk: That should be left to local commanders. It's not very long.

President: Let's outline all other courses and see them

Ball: We have just about exhausted ~~these~~ ^{this party} contacts based on what we have given them about our position.

President: But the Viet Cong haven't done anything. They get a lot of hay by just talking.

Bundy: If we had a newspaper in Hanoi not under their control, we could do more (laughter).

Down the road there are a lot of areas we haven't ~~done~~ -- such as formulas on when they shoot and we shoot back as we move around Vietnam.

We could plow a straight furrow during winter and spring and clean out the South -- and put the onus of continued fighting on them.

I would like to get the diplomatic experience of this pause. We have a lot of diplomatic maneuvering to do.

Rusk: One of the pitfalls is that a new situation can always turn out different. For example, lifting of the Berlin blockade came as a surprise. In the Pusan peninsula, we thought we couldn't hang on -- and we did.

I have a feeling that the other side is not that tough -- and it does not follow in a year or two we won't be in the far more favorable position. I think the other side is hurting just as we are hurting.

Clifford: We could make quite a case that our stand is producing good results by preventing the Viet Cong from achieving their objective. Perhaps we can connect beneficial events in Indonesia with our presence in Viet-Nam. At heart we are preventing a communist takeover in Viet-Nam and that is to our credit.

Rusk: I presume you don't think we can put a greatly increased offensive? (to McNamara)

McNamara: No. We are increasing but so are the Viet Cong. We have 34 U.S. battalions plus 7 more soon, plus 10 Australian and others. South Viet-Nam has 600,000 men. The Viet Cong have 240,000 (probably two or three North Vietnamese divisions -- and increasing). By the end of January, 230,000 U.S. and others.

President: What do you think we ought to do if we don't pause, Bob?

McNamara: As a minimum, carry on the military buildup.

Study the possibility of a ceasefire, which I would recommend in a few months, whether as a propaganda device or a military standstill.

President: Any solid information of increasing of North Vietnamese activities?

McNamara: Stepped-up infiltration to 1500 a month through Laos. Soon up to 4,000 a month -- this has not been proved, however. About a year ago they began bringing in regular troops instead of cadres. About nine regiments of regulars are there. They have substantially expanded facilities.

Fortas: What would the Viet Cong propose in this 12-hour truce?

Alex Johnson: They said that soldiers without arms would not be attacked for 12 hours.

Fortas: If we are concerned about public opinion, this is something we ought to consider carefully. This would be capable of producing an adverse reaction in this country.

President: Mac, would you undertake to lay out a speech for Tuesday?

Dean, would you lay out alternatives available to us?

Alex, do you have any strong views. If you were President what would you do?

Alex Johnson: I'd take the pause -- if for no other reason than to engage the Russians.

President: Couldn't we engage them by saying we are ready to stop if the Viet Cong are?

Alex Johnson: No, I don't think we can without a bombing pause.

President: What troubles me more is their doubt as to our will to see this thing through.

What problems do we get into if we don't bomb on Christmas -- and tell the Russians what we are going -- and that we might do more?

You say the Russians won't and can't do any more unless we stop bombing. And yet they probably won't do anything.

Meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.