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GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

GSA FORM 7122 (7-72)

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Agenda ~ p. 3. — Checked by phone with Clark Clifford W.

~~SECRET~~

Thursday, November 2, 1967 -- 8:15 a.m.

Mr. President:

This memorandum incorporates a brief summary of the discussion last night plus some suggestions for how the meeting this morning might be handled.

I. Report on the meeting.

1. The meeting began with two briefings: one by Gen. Wheeler and the other by George Carver. I would urge you to check with Clark Clifford and others, but I found the briefings impressive, especially Carver who hit just the right balance between the progress we have made and the problems we still confront. He handled the population control data in a lucid but credible way. There was hardly a word spoken that could not be given directly to the press. You may wish to consider a full leadership meeting of this kind, introduced by yourself, after which you could put the whole thing on television, perhaps when Bunker is here.

2. They both concluded that there was very great progress since 1965. We can't count on sufficient progress in the next 15 months to collapse the enemy; but Carver made two good points with respect to the future:

-- In part, the future is in our hands and the South Vietnamese's. In particular, the appointment of good officials and effective attack on corruption and a sharp improvement of the ARVN in pacification operations could produce dramatic change.

-- From the point of view of Hanoi, they would make a strategic decision to end the war when they had decided the U.S. would not behave like the French did in 1954 and when a viable state structure seemed on the way to emerging in Saigon.

3. Sec. Rusk then, over drinks, reviewed the attitude of Hanoi towards negoations, emphasizing that their eyes were increasingly fastened on American politics.

4. The general discussion then came to focus around two issues:

-- The problem of sustained support for our policy within the U.S.; and the bombing question.

Arthur Dean and General Bradley spent a good deal of their time on the domestic situation and how to present the story of the war in ways which would encourage our people to unify and stay the course. Dean cited the kinds of questions he got in talking to college audiences. Dean Acheson put forward the view that the bulk of the university student opposition stemmed from an understandable desire not to have to go to fight in Vietnam. He was challenged by Mac Bundy and others that this was part but not all the story.

5. On bombing the line up was about as follows:

-- All agreed with McNamara, who read from a CIA document, that bombing did not prevent the present level of infiltration of men and arms.

-- George Ball and Dean Acheson urged that we use bombing as a negotiating chip against pressure across the DMZ. Acheson said that we should stop bombing when they did not press across the DMZ and resume bombing when they did until they got the point. Sec. Rusk pointed out we had tried to establish that connection but had failed; but they rather ignored what he was saying. Bob Murphy and General Bradley, in particular, said that out of their experience over the years they were sure that the bombing was having some effect on operations in the South, although it could not be precisely measured. In this discussion it emerged that while Helms, agreed with Sec. McNamara that the present level of bombing would not have a demonstrable effect on flows to the South, he disagreed with the judgment that a stoppage of bombing would not result in increased flows to the South. It might.

6. Arthur Dean made strongly the point, out of his experience, that an excessive ~~aggressiveness~~ eagerness to negotiate or a broad humanitarian gesture to the Communists is interpreted as a sign of weakness by Communists.

7. At the close Sec. Rusk urged them all to put their minds to this question: In the face of the situation, as it was outlined to them, what would they do if they were President?

8. Douglas Dillon's questions mainly centered on possibilities for escalation against the North; that is, mining the harbors, hitting the dikes, etc.

9. Incidentally, I detected in this group no sentiment for our pulling out of Vietnam.

II. This is one possible way to handle the meeting this morning at 10:30 a.m.

1. Thank them for giving their time; and suggest the importance of maintaining the existence and substance of the meeting in confidence. You would like to call on them again. But they constitute so weighty a group that public knowledge of their meetings might be misinterpreted and lead to speculation of crises.

2. A President faced with the present situation constantly must ask himself two questions:

-- Is our course in Vietnam right? If it is right, how can we increase public understanding and support for that policy? As they are aware, Hanoi's view of U.S. public understanding and support is a major front in the war -- perhaps now the most important front.

3. The first question is: Is there anything that we are not doing in the South that we ought to do?

(You might go around the table on this issue.)

The second question: With respect to the North, should we: continue what we are doing? Mine the ports and plan to take down the dikes when the water is hight? Unilaterally reduce or eliminate bombing of North Vietnam?

(Again around the table.)

The third question: Negotiations. Should we adopt a passive policy of willingness to negotiate but wait for their initiatives?

If we should try additional initiatives, what should they be?

Despite their refusal of the San Antonio formula, should we unilaterally cease bombing and just see what happens?

The fourth question: Taking into account all that they know, do they believe that we should in one way or another get out of Vietnam?

The fifth question: What measures would they suggest to rally and unite our own people behind the effort in Vietnam?

I suggest that Tom Johnson be present and keep a tally sheet on each man with respect to each question.

WWR Rostow