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OCTOBER 14, 1968

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Meeting with Foreign Policy Advisory Group

The President  
Secretary Rusk  
Secretary Clifford  
General Wheeler  
General Taylor

CIA Director Helms  
Walt Rostow  
George Christian  
Tom Johnson

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By JC. NARA, Date 8-24-01

10/16/68

Meeting with the President, Monday, October 14, 9:40 a.m., in the Cabinet Room.

Present: Secretary Rusk, Secretary Clifford, General Wheeler, Mr. Helms, General Taylor, Mr. Rostow (later joined by Mr. Christian and Mr. T. Johnson)

Secretary Rusk informed the President that all present had now been briefed on events since Friday. The President might wish to get their reactions and then consider next steps.

The President, noting a question raised by Thieu(?), asked why infiltration was not involved in our formula.

General Wheeler explained that it was difficult to monitor infiltration performance unilaterally and that it was better to keep our bombing of Laos going. Secretary Rusk underlined the critical importance of the apparent acceptance by Hanoi of GVN participation. This was a real turning point and would so be understood in Asia and the world, as well as by the VC in the South.

The President asked: Why is participation of the NLF being accepted? Secretary Rusk responded that this would not be a three-cornered confrontation; that is, with Saigon and the NLF together confronting Hanoi on the one side and Washington on the other. The arrangement would be our side-your side.

But the real importance was that Hanoi, which had vowed never to talk to the "Thieu-Ky clique," was now prepared to acknowledge the reality of the GVN. This means that there can be no settlement in Vietnam without the assent of the GVN. We have always said that there would be no problem in having the views of the NLF heard.

GVN participation could have a major effect on the political and psychological situation inside South Vietnam; the Chieu Hoi rates should go up; there should be more defectors; etc. Vance had told Secretary Rusk that the acceptance of the GVN was the most difficult of all our conditions. Vance, in fact, believed that they would never accept. Acceptance of the GVN will be fully understood by our Asian friends. Critical issues of face and prestige are involved for Hanoi, as well as favorable factors for Saigon.

The President then asked: Suppose they do accept the GVN and nothing happens in a month or for several weeks? What if we have a stalemate in the talks? What do we do then?

Secretary Rusk replied that if there are no attacks across the DMZ or on population centers, we could go a month or so in a stalemate. But if there is a buildup for later large military operations, that would be a different matter. We should give them until about December 1st before we resume bombing, to see if the talks in fact become serious. If they attack across the DMZ or attack the cities, then we could resume at any time according to the conditions we have put to them.

On the other hand, Secretary Rusk pointed out there would be costs in resuming the bombing too soon; for example, in 10 days. Before we resume we must be in a position to demonstrate that we tested their good faith. Then we could publish our record.

Mr. Helms said that the CIA had been brainstorming the situation developing in Paris over recent weeks. They saw the one great danger in the



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*- The one great vulnerability -*

situation -- the one hole ~~invulnerable~~ in our position was the question of GVN participation. If the GVN did not participate, all his experts believed there was doubt that the GVN could hold steady. It would probably collapse. Hanoi's concession on the GVN is therefore very important. It is the one thing that fills in the big hole in our negotiating position. It is very significant. Helms agreed fully with the evaluation of Secretary Rusk. Secretary Rusk said that it was his impression that the CIA analysts believed that Hanoi would never accept the GVN at the table. Helms confirmed this as correct.

The President then asked about reconnaissance. Does our formula permit us to continue reconnaissance? Secretary Rusk said that our instruction, referring to "acts of force" rather than "acts of war," would permit reconnaissance. Moreover, he had just bluntly made the point to Dobrynin, who did not react negatively.

The President then asked: Do they understand the "facts of life" about the DMZ and the cities?

Secretary Rusk said that if the other side accepted in silence our statement of the "facts of life", we should be prepared to move on that "assumption."

The President asked: What if we stop bombing and they hit the cities?

Secretary Rusk said that we would have to resume bombing. What they do will determine our behavior. If they violate the facts of life, we would be back with "business as usual."

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Secretary Rusk noted that we had just pulled back the NEW JERSEY from around the Vinh area to a point closer to the DMZ.

The President pressed on. He said he did not wish our understanding to be "fuzzy." It was necessary that there be clarity among us. If they take advantage and violate the facts of life as we have stated them, what do we do?

Secretary Rusk said we would resume bombing and disclose the full record. LIFE magazine had referred to the President and the Secretary of State as the "two lonely men." They would still be here.

The President then turned to Secretary Clifford and asked him to brief the group, first on his trip with General Wheeler to Europe, and then to give his reactions to the situation we now confronted with respect to Vietnam.

Secretary Clifford said that the nuclear planning group meeting he had just attended was the best that had ever been held. There had been great candor and seriousness among all the members.

He had called on Chancellor Kiesinger for a half hour, but the meeting went an hour and a half.

He had made the point with great force to Chancellor Kiesinger that "unless the Germans did something by the end of the year," the pressures in Congress for withdrawal of U. S. forces would rise and, in his judgment, Congress would act.

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Kiesinger had talked about his political problems with the budget and especially pressure from the farmers. But he said that the one deterrent to Soviet action against Germany is the "presence of U. S. forces in Europe" -- not the nuclear weapons, but the forces. Secretary Clifford observed that Kiesinger was a bit of a "soft-soaper" but he (Clifford) had kept the gut issue before him: the U. S. position on forces in Europe would only hold to the end of the year unless Germany "did something."

Clifford also had seen Schroeder with Gen. Wheeler. Schroeder is making plans to expand the German military budget and to improve German military forces. They are considering an order for 88 Phantoms which would cost \$488 million. The Germans wished to have certain components for these Phantoms produced in Germany. We are agreeable, but made it clear that they would have to bid successfully on a competitive basis for these parts.

Secretary Clifford said that we are now beginning at last to get "some movement" out of the Germans. In the past there was talk; now there was action.

He believed that the Czech crisis had saved a dangerous situation which was almost lost on the Hill. Now there is a little time if the Germans and the others act.

Secretary Clifford reported that his trip to Berlin had been very valuable. He spent a half-day there and made six speeches. His visit received enormous press coverage. He had met with several different groups in Berlin;

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visited the Brandenburg Gate; the U. S. brigade; and had lunch with the Mayor of Berlin. Throughout, he had used Secretary Rusk's language. When asked about what the U. S. would do if access to Berlin were blocked, he had said: The U. S. will take appropriate action in case of interference with ingress or egress to or from Berlin.

On Saturday night he had a dinner with the Schroeders (ladies present) where there was a good firm discussion.

On Sunday he met with the troop commanders in Stuttgart.: Generals Lemnitzer, Wade, Polk, Burchinal, and Admiral Wendt. There was a full and frank exchange on what lay ahead for NATO.

Clifford thought that these had been a "uniquely productive four or five days."

The President urged Secretary Clifford to read Nixon's speech on NATO.

*General Wheeler* German  
~~Secretary Clifford~~ then reported that in conversations with/General de Maiziere, certain plans that would be recommended by the military to the German government became more clear. The government had already decided on an increase in the military budget of 750 million DM (\$165 million). They were planning certain improvements in the force; for example, Phantoms for recce, also some new helicopters. They wished to call up reserves for training to improve the manning of their forces. They planned more noncoms.

If others in NATO did more, the Germans would go still further with the expansion of their military budget. Clifford believed that within the next couple of days a "series of firm proposals" would come forward to the German government from their military.

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General de Maiziere said he would like to go above the 458,000 German military manpower ceiling. He envisaged no new structures in the German military forces, but wanted better manning of existing forces, which are now at about 80-85%. If this proposal were accepted, he would like U. S. support, with our other NATO allies, to help allay fears about an expansion in the German armed forces.

Secretary Clifford summed up:

- the Germans are working hard to improve their forces;
- the visit to Berlin was a tremendous plus and received excellent coverage, noting parenthetically that U. S. armed forces broadcasts were listened to by Germans and probably had an audience of 20-30 million.

The President expressed gratification at Clifford's remarks.

Secretary Rusk said that one of the most important things that has happened in Germany is the understanding that the use of nuclear weapons is a serious and most dangerous business and that conventional forces are being taken very seriously.

(at this point, note-taking was picked up by Tom Johnson)

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