

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATIONPRESIDENT'S MEETING WITH CONGRESSIONAL
BIPARTISAN LEADERSHIPDATE AND TIME: Tuesday, April 29, 1975
11:30 a.m.

PLACE: The White House

President: [after outlining the situation leading up to the helicopter evacuation.] The helicopter operation has been and is going on and we don't want any break in that, Jim. Henry, will you summarize.

Kissinger: Tan Son Nhut came under rocket attack yesterday and its continued use is problematical. The President ordered one more day for C-130s to evacuate 8,000 high-risk Vietnamese and DAO people, and thinning out of the Embassy to the absolute minimum. Those remaining were to be helicopter-pulled tonight. That order was overcome by chaos at the airport. The President then ordered the helicopter evacuation. There are only 89 at DAO, 700 still at Embassy. We don't know how many there are Americans. So far, 1237 from the Embassy and 4100 (?) from DAO. These figures are changing every few minutes. So far there is no hostile action and no retaliation so far as I know -- except for the two Marines killed. There has been no action to interfere except mortar fire.

Our effort all along has been to stabilize the situation, to permit, first, saving American lives; evacuation of high-risk Vietnamese; to bring about a transition with as little chaos and bloodshed as possible. It is too early to say, but if it goes as it is now, we will have achieved our objectives. We will have evacuated about 45,000 high-risk Vietnamese and through third parties we obtained a lull which allowed governmental adjustments in as orderly a manner as possible. The evacuation should be over in an hour and a half if all goes well.



DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5

NSC Memo, 11/24/98, State Dept. Guidelines
By lct, NARA, Date 1/24/00~~TOP SECRET~~ - XGDS (3)
CLASSIFIED BY: HENRY A. KISSINGER

President: There were no operational problems once the lift got started. One problem has been Americans coming in out of the woodwork. Until yesterday, we avoided a panic of the Vietnamese, and then we had to move to helicopter evacuation.

Jim --

Schlesinger: There was one return of ground fire, and one A-7 and one CH-46 were lost (not operational). We have picked up substantial equipment, including a number of aircraft. We had planned for a fixed-wing evacuation and thus planned for mixed loads. Since they had been mixed, we loaded them all.

Albert: Have we been ordered out [by the Government]?

President: Yes. At about 1:30 this morning.

Kissinger: It came in two stages. Last night it was the DAO. This morning they escalated and asked all Americans to leave. This may have had the benefit of keeping down ARVN disaffection since the evacuation looked like a response to a request.

President: At the NSC last night, I directed that all should come out in one operation. We do, however, have to give people on the ground some flexibility.

Byrd: Over what period was the equipment brought out?

Schlesinger: Over the recent period. We got an evacuation of VNAF and the Navy and only a few high value items from Bien Hoa.

Mansfield: Now that we are out, is Minh negotiating under Article 12?

Kissinger: He has offered to negotiate from the outset. But the DRV has constantly escalated its demands. First they said Thieu had to go. Then Thieu left and they said it had to be Minh, then to stop military action, then a whole new administrative structure. My guess is there will be a dismantling followed by some kind of tripartite government in form.

Burton: Could we delay the bill and get an assurance the evacuation authority would not be used?

[End]



April 29, 1975

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

PARTICIPANTS: President Ford
Vice President Rockefeller
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State
and Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
James R. Schlesinger, Secretary of Defense
Bipartisan Congressional Leadership (List
attached)

DATE AND TIME: Tuesday, April 29, 1975
11:40 - 12:30 p.m.

PLACE: The Cabinet Room
The White House

SUBJECT: Vietnam Evacuation

The President: When I made my April 10 request for legislation, we had about 6,000 Americans in South Vietnam. We also felt that there were about 200,000 to 275,000 South Vietnamese we had some obligation to in return for their long service to the United States. Since April 10, we have acted to draw down greatly the number of Americans in Vietnam. Last Saturday we ordered the Embassy to be down to 1,095 Americans. In the meantime we have also withdrawn a large number of the high risk South Vietnamese citizens. We had planned that Monday, yesterday, would be the last day on which we could remove the Americans by fixed wing aircraft. It was our plan to remove the Defense Attache's Office entirely.

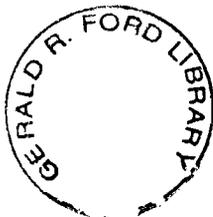
But then yesterday, the rocket attacks and artillery attacks on Tan Son Nhut Airport began. The rockets did not bother us much but the accurate artillery fire gave us considerable concern. We had scheduled a number of C-130s for the final evacuation but the rocket and artillery attacks precluded the possibility of the C-130s landing. I, therefore, issued orders last evening for the helicopter evacuation operation to begin.

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NSC Memo, 11/24/98, State Dept. Guidelines
By HH, NARA, Date 1/24/00

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~~TOP SECRET~~ - XGDS (3)
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We planned to have the helicopters land at both the Embassy and Tan Son Nhut. The evacuation operation is still going on at this time and will continue to do so without interruption until the last American is out. Jim (Schlesinger), I want you to ensure there is no break or interruption in this operation.

At this point I would like to ask Henry Kissinger to give you the latest figures we have on the status of the evacuation.

Secretary Kissinger: On Tuesday morning Saigon time, we received reports that continued use of the airport was problematic. The President ordered one more day of airlift for 8,000 additional high risk Vietnamese already gathered at the airport plus the 400 Defense Attache personnel working at the airport. The rest of the Americans were at the Embassy in Saigon and the President ordered that the Embassy's personnel be stripped to a minimum. That order was overtaken by events when the attacks on the airport occurred and discipline there broke down, with civilians blocking the runways. This occurred about 10:30 last night our time. The President then ordered the full helicopter evacuation and that operation is continuing now. The latest numbers we have show some 89 Americans remaining at the DAO compound at the airport and about 700 people still at the Embassy grounds. We don't know how many of these are Americans. Let me give you the total number of people evacuated by helicopter at this point: 1237 from the Embassy and almost 4,000 from the DAO.

So far there have been no casualties and no need for hostile action in this operation. However there were two marines killed by a rocket attack before the helicopter evacuation started. There has been no ^{NORTH} Vietnamese attempt to interfere with this effort except some minor sniper fire.

I would point out that our whole effort over the past two weeks has been to achieve some measure of stability in the situation in South Vietnam:(1) to save American lives, (2) to save as many as possible of the Vietnamese to whom we owed an obligation for their association with the United States, and (3) to bring about whatever political evolution that might be possible without bloodshed if such a way could be found. These objectives will have been achieved successfully when the last American leaves Saigon later today. We will have moved out over 45,000 high risk Vietnamese Nationals. I would also add that through third parties, we were able to achieve a lull in the fighting and thus permit a possible political solution to take place. Nevertheless, we have no illusion about North Vietnamese intentions or the probable ultimate outcome in Vietnam.



The President: It is nearly midnight in Saigon but so far our evacuation operation is continuing without problems. I would point out one problem we ran into in recent days was that the number of Americans kept going up as AWOL soldiers and others continuously showed up in Saigon to be evacuated. This kept the overall total from dropping very much despite the fact that we were moving large numbers of people out of Saigon. We have also been able to avert any panic among the South Vietnamese, at least until yesterday. Only yesterday did the situation become difficult in the wake of the attacks on the airport. Jim, do you have any additional points to make?

Secretary Schlesinger: I think I want to mention a few incidents which have occurred that you may be hearing about. One of our F-4s took some antiaircraft fire. The F-4 returned fire but this is the only use of force from our side so far. One A-7 failed to get back to the ship but the pilot was recovered. One helicopter has also been lost. We have also flown out of Vietnam some \$300 to \$400 million in equipment. This is mostly aircraft from the Vietnamese Air Force. A substantial number of planes have been saved in this way.

When Tan Son Nhut was closed we were faced with mixed loads of passengers awaiting the scheduled C-130s. Because it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to separate the Americans from the Vietnamese awaiting evacuation, the decision was made to take out the Vietnamese already assembled at the DAO compound. I want to say, Mr. President, that our helicopters and other forces are performing magnificently despite difficult conditions and considerable fatigue.

Question: Were we ordered out of Vietnam by the South Vietnamese?

The President: Yes, President Minh had ordered all the Americans out.

Secretary Kissinger: There were two stages in this process. First, the Communists demanded the removal of all U. S. defense personnel. Then this morning the Communists escalated their demands to ask for the removal of all U. S. personnel. President Minh acquiesced in this demand. I would say that this had some advantage for us in that it made our departure look like it was done at the request of the South Vietnamese Government and, therefore, may have served to keep the disaffection down among the South Vietnamese. Nevertheless, the President's decision to withdraw Americans was made before President Minh's request.



The President: The evacuation decision was made at a meeting of the NSC last night which began at about 7:00 and lasted until after 8:00. Because of the situation on the ground, we tried to give some flexibility to our people there, but we soon gave the order for the final evacuation effort.

Question: When was all that equipment brought out?

Secretary Schlesinger: In recent days a substantial amount of high value equipment, including computers, was flown out from Binh Hoa. We also arranged to fly out a large number of aircraft and also a number of naval vessels were removed from South Vietnam. Thus, a substantial quantity of materiel has been saved. Some of this we can use and some of it we will want to give to our allies in the region.

Question: Is President Minh undertaking the negotiations required by Paris Accords?

Secretary Kissinger: Minh has repeatedly offered negotiations as the Accords require, but the Communists have constantly escalated their demands. It is my impression that the Communists want the total dissolution of the South Vietnamese Government.

Question: What will they eventually do?

Secretary Kissinger: Nobody really knows. They may opt for some type of interim PRG Government structure and then follow this with some thinly disguised plebiscite to reunite the South with North Vietnam.

Question: The House is to vote today on H. 6096, the Humanitarian Assistance Bill. Is it still relevant? Will we respond to appeals for humanitarian relief?

The President: We should approve this legislation so that we can respond to the humanitarian needs, but we will want to reserve judgment on giving aid to the occupied areas of South Vietnam.

Question: But there will be no need to invoke the evacuation provisions of that bill.

The President: The authorities contained in that bill are now moot.

Question: Should we delay the House vote by a day to clarify these questions?



Secretary Kissinger: By this time tomorrow we can assure you that the evacuation authority will not be used.

Question: Can we delay a decision on the money involved?

The President: By later today we can give you assurances on the evacuation authority. Perhaps the bill could then be passed tomorrow. We will know how much money will be needed by Thursday. As you know we have borrowed funds under the Section 614 waiver authority. We will need to replace these funds at some point.

Question: You definitely will need a replacement?

The President: Yes, and we will need additional funds for continued humanitarian assistance.

Question: Will you send up a supplemental request for appropriations?

The President: Yes, we will.

Question: Is some of this money to help the Government of Guam and other governments?

The President: I hope the precise language of the legislation will permit us some flexibility to put the money where it is needed.

Question: What is wrong with scrapping the bill we now have and starting over again to come up with something clean? There is no need for the evacuation authority now.

The President: I don't think it is necessary to scrap the bill. The proper authority is there whether we need it or not, but we definitely need the funding as soon as possible.

Question: We can send the bill back to conference to delete the evacuation authority from the bill.

Question: I would hope the House would move to pass the bill anyway.

Question: Why can't we avoid a lot of controversy in the House by eliminating the section on evacuation authority?

Question: If the President will give us assurance that he won't use the authority, why can't we just respond to the President's request for funds and vote the bill immediately.



The President: When you appropriate the funds, why don't you just write the appropriation so it doesn't refer to those objectionable authorities.

Question: But the authority for the use of troops, even if moot, will cause great trouble on the Hill as a precedent. Even if the President assures us that the authority will not be used, we will still have considerable opposition to the bill.

Question: We don't want to establish any precedents.

The President: But that is moot. It was only to give me the ability to respond to an urgent situation which is now passed us. Why can't you just write your restrictions into the appropriations bill?

wouldn't

The Vice President: I want to ask, _/ the authority to use troops in the House bill be a useful precedent to establish for a possible Middle East contingency?

Question: Why not send the conference report package to committee requesting that section 4 be eliminated?

Question: Let's get the President's assurances then we can send it back to the conference committee.

The President: Why don't you delay action until later today or even until tomorrow.

Question: I can say that the Senate will accept striking out the evacuation authority if the House acts to do so and the President gives us the assurances he mentioned.

The President (to Schlesinger): Jim, when will the evacuation operation end?

Secretary Schlesinger: We really don't know because of some bad weather. With good weather we should be out by 2:00 p.m.

The President: Can we notify the Congress by 2:00 p.m.?

Secretary Kissinger: Wouldn't it be better to wait until tomorrow for the House to vote on the conference report.

The President: Can we postpone a vote until tomorrow morning?



Question: I definitely think we should defer action until tomorrow.

Speaker Albert: I will call right now to tell Morgan to hold up a vote until tomorrow. (Albert leaves room briefly.)

Question: Can we presume that less than \$327 million will be needed?

The President: We will have to analyze our needs and then make a judgment. We will send up a request for appropriations when we have made this analysis.

Question: I can tell you that the bill will be defeated if you even hint of asking to give money to Hanoi.

Question: What have France and other Third Countries done to help bring about a settlement and to take in some refugees?

The President: We made maximum use of third parties in our diplomatic efforts for a ceasefire.

Secretary Kissinger: We also approached many countries to take in refugees but we estimate that 90 percent of the 45,000 refugees will come to the United States. The President granted parole authority for 130,000 but this was only an initial estimate. It now looks like 50,000 will be the top number.

Question: 50,000 is all this country can absorb at any rate.

Secretary Kissinger: There is no way the total number can go much beyond 50,000.

Question: Mr. President, I hope you will make a public statement at some point asking the American people to make donations for refugee assistance.

The President: I plan to do so and I also plan to meet with a group of private, nongovernmental organizations to ask them to make a maximum effort in the resettlement of the refugees.

Let me also ask all of you as we break up not to make any comments to the press. Secretary Kissinger will give a press briefing when the evacuation operation is completed, and I think it best if we avoid any comment in the meantime.



PARTICIPANTS

The President
The Vice President

SENATE

Mike Mansfield
Bob Byrd
Hugh Scott
Bob Griffin
John McClellan
Milt Young
John Stennis
Strom Thurmond
John Sparkman
Cliff Case
John Eastland
Carl Curtis
Frank Moss

HOUSE

Speaker Albert
Tip O'Neill
John McFall
John Rhodes
Bob Michel
George Mahon
Al Cederberg
Tom Morgan
Bill Broomfield
Mel Price
Bob Wilson
John Anderson
Phil Burton

STAFF

Secretary of State Kissinger
Secretary of Defense Schlesinger
Don Rumsfeld
Bob Hartmann
Jack Marsh
Max Friedersdorf
Phil Buchen
Ron Nessen
Jim Cannon
Jim Lynn
Bill Seidman
Dick Cheney
Vern Loen
Bill Kendall
Bob Wolthuis
Brent Scowcroft
Pat O'Donnell
Debra Bennett *Charles Lippert*



✓ Leadership Mtg 29 Apr 75

P Outlined the situation leading up to helo was. The helo has been & is going on & we don't want any break in it, from it, with you summing

K TSN en under search attacks repeatedly & continued use problematic. Re ad and morning 0-121 A was 800 high with Knee & DAO people, & thin out of Frank to credit mine. Remaining were to be helo packed transport. That order overcome by change out. Other order helo was. Only 89 at DAO, 700 still at Frank - don't know how many are down. So far, 1237 from Frank & 4100 from DAO. These figures changing every few minutes. So far no hostile action & no retal action so far as known - except for 2 Marines killed. No action to interfere except snipe fire.

One effort all along has been to stabilize to permit: Saving our lives; was h-r knee, being about transition w/ or little chaos & bloodshed as possible. Too early to say, but if you do it we will have a chance on objectives. We will have some about 40, see the knee & three 3rd parties are obtained a full under allowed positional adjustments in as orderly manner as possible. It was should be done in 1/2 hrs if all you could.

P We got pos once a left got started. One jet has been down coming in out of clouds. Tail of jet by an armed parade of knee & then we had to move to helo down. Jim -

S There was one return of ground fire, one A-7 & CH-46 lost (not spec). We have packed up sets, equip

incl a # of a/cft. US had planned first coming & then planned wiped loads. Since they had been wiped we had all.

Albert How can we be released out

P Yes. About 1:30 this morning

K Come in 2 stages. Last night it was DAD. This morning they escalated & added all to home. This may have had benefit by buying down ARON disaffection since we looked like we'd request.

P NSE decided last night decided all should come out in 1 op. Do, however, have to give people one good some pay.

Byrd. Over what period are we buying brought out.

S Over ^{next} period. We got more of crunch of OMAF & Wing & a few high value items from Ben Hon.

Wangfield How we are out, is it with next. under art 12.

K He has offered some context. But DRU has constructively escalated its demands. ^{at} Then, then crunch, then will, then a depression structure. My guess is there will be dominantly followed by some kind tripartite position from.

~~Wangfield~~

Benton Could we play a bill & get an assurance we authority would not be used.