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MEMORANDUM

3716-X

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

TOP SECRET / SENSITIVE

May 29, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR: SECRETARY KISSINGER

FROM: W. R. SMYSER

SUBJECT: NSC Meeting of May 13, 1975

Attached are the minutes of the National Security Council meeting held on May 13, 1975.

Attachment.

cc: General Scowcroft

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ORIGINAL RETURN TO PRESERVATION

TOP SECRET / SENSITIVE - XGDS



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

MINUTES

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

Date: Tuesday, May 13, 1975
Time: 10:40 p.m. to 12:25 a.m.
Place: Cabinet Room, the White House
Subject: Seizure of American Ship by Cambodian Authorities

Principals

The President
The Vice President
Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger
Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger
Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. David C. Jones
Director of Central Intelligence William Colby

Other Attendees

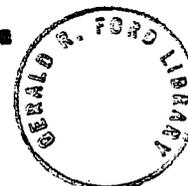
State: Deputy Secretary of State Robert Ingersoll
DOD: Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements
WH: Donald Rumsfeld
John Marsh
Robert Hartmann
Philip Buchen
NSC: Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft
W. Richard Smyser

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958 Sec. 3.8

MR 91-20, #3 NSC ltr 3/19/96

By KAH, NARA, Date 3/20/96



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ORIGINAL RETURN TO DECLASSIFICATION

President: Brent, can you tell us what the situation is?

Scowcroft: With regard to the boat that I told you about, we do not have much time. Our aircraft has used riot control agents twice. That has delayed the boat but it has not stopped it. It is now about six miles from Kompong Som, according to the pilot. The pilot is not at all sure that he can disable the boat without sinking it.

President: I thought the first boat had reached the shore.

Schlesinger: It got to the island.

Jones: It was in range.

President: I understand we sank the second one. And the third one is the one we are now talking about.

Scowcroft: That is correct. That boat is now six miles from Kompong Som.

President: Did the pilot try riot control agents?

Scowcroft: They were tried and they did not work. Now the pilot is not sure what to do next.

Schlesinger: He is not certain that there are Caucasians on board.

President: Let's look at it. If they got to shore, and we have done the other things we are contemplating, there will not be much opportunity for them anyway.

Kissinger: They will hold them for bargaining.

Hartmann: How can the pilot tell whether the men are Caucasians?

Schlesinger: By a number of signs, such as their size and the color of their skin.

Scowcroft: It is not an easy identification. It is very tough.

Schlesinger: I would think that avoiding bargaining chips is less of an objective than not being in a position where the Cambodians can say that the F-4's killed our own men.



President: What do we do? Should we let them go into port?

Schlesinger: Let's continue to try to stop them with riot control agents. We understand there are 8 to 9 men on board who seem to be Americans. There are others below who may be Americans. The pilot thinks there may be more Americans.

President: What do you recommend?

Schlesinger: I recommend we sink the speedboats. I do not think we should sink the other boat but should rather continue to use the riot control agents.

Scowcroft: The pilot is reluctant to attack if he is under instructions not to sink the boat.

Schlesinger: That is true. He originally thought that he could disable the boat without sinking it. Then he became reluctant.

President: What do you think?

Kissinger: I have just come back into this problem, having been out of town all day. My instinct would have been as follows:

We have two problems:

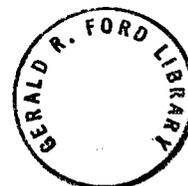
-- First, the problem of the crew and the ship and of how we win their release.

-- Second, our general posture which goes beyond the crew and the ship.

But that sort of thing comes later.

In the immediate situation, I think I agree with Jim. We will take a beating if we kill the Americans. At the same time, we must understand that we cannot negotiate for them once they are on the mainland. If you are willing to take that position, then I think we can let them go. We should not let them become bargaining chips.

Scowcroft: We have already done it on one.



Schlesinger: There were no Caucasians on it.

Kissinger: We have a pilot who thinks there may be Caucasians. It would have been a much better position for us to take that we will simply hit anything that leaves the island.

President: Right.

Kissinger: Now we are debating with the pilot.

President: I gave the order at the meeting to stop all boats. I cannot understand what happened on that order, because I heard that it did not go out until 3:30.

Schlesinger: It went out by telephone within half an hour after you gave it.

Jones: We talked to Burns, the Commander out there, immediately. The confirming order went out later. But our communications are so good that we can get all the information back here immediately to Washington in order to make the decisions from here.

President: Was the order given, and at what time, not to permit any boats to leave the island or come into it? I was told it was not given until 3:30. That is inexcusable.

Jones: That was the written order, not the verbal order.

President: Let's find out when it was given.

Clements: To assist General Jones, I was with him in the Situation Room when he gave the order even before he left the White House.

President: Let's find out what happened. It is inexcusable to have such a delay.

Now let us talk about the problem of the moment. It is a different situation, and I reluctantly agree with Jim and Henry.

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Schlesinger: I think we should destroy the boats that still remain at the island.

President: That is your recommendation. What do you think, Henry?

Kissinger: I'm afraid that if we do a few little steps every few hours, we are in trouble. I think we should go ahead with the island, Kompong Som, and the ship all at once. I think people should have the impression that we are potentially trigger-happy. I think that once we have our destroyer on station, that is ideal.

Schlesinger: I agree. It will go in at noon.

Kissinger: In the meantime, I think we should sink the boats that are at the island.

Rumsfeld: I thought the HOLT would get in at 8:00 a. m.

Schlesinger: We understand it is doing 21 knots, not 25.

Scowcroft: I have got to get the word out. What should I tell them?

President: Tell them to sink the boats near the island. On the other boat, use riot control agents or other methods, but do not attack it.

Marsh: Supposing the boats near the island have Americans on it. Should we send some order to use only riot control agents there?

Kissinger: I think the pilot should sink them. He should destroy the boats and not send situation reports.

President: On one boat, there is a possibility of Caucasians. On the others, we can't be sure.

Jones: Suppose we say in our order that they should hit all the boats in the cove, not just two.

Kissinger: We don't need to decide on the cove right now. We have some time.



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ORIGINAL RETENTION AND CLASSIFICATION

President: Is it 11:00 o'clock there now?

Schlesinger: It is 10:00 o'clock.

President: How many hours away is the HOLT?

Kissinger: Fourteen hours.

Jones: (Raising a chart) I have tried to put all this in a chart, indicating when the key actions would take place. The HOLT, we expect, will arrive at 12:30 Washington time tomorrow. The CORAL SEA and the HANCOCK will arrive later. We are not sure of the latter's arrival time because it is having trouble with one propeller shaft.

The Marines are all airborne. They are on the way to Utapao. That is the 1,000 Marines. The 150, with their helicopters, are already there and on the alert. The 1,000 Marines will arrive around 0300 tomorrow morning. That is the time for the first one. After that the others arrive every few hours.

President: Then the HOLT arrives at 11:30 Eastern Daylight time tomorrow. That is 2330 Cambodia time.

And the CORAL SEA about 28 hours from now.

Jones: It is making 25 knots. The plots are pretty good. It is moving towards the spot.

President: That is not flank speed.

Jones: That is the best time that they can do.

President: Flank speed is 33 knots.

Jones: The Navy says that that is the best time that they can make.

Rumsfeld: The information this afternoon was that the HANCOCK would arrive on Friday.

Jones: This is very tenuous. They are working on one of the shafts.



Rumsfeld: That is 2200, Friday, the 16th?

Jones: No, the 15th.

Schlesinger: We are in serious trouble on the mechanical side. One shaft is out on the HANCOCK. The OKINAWA has an oiler out. It is making only 10 knots. There has been a series of mishaps.

President: What can be done before daylight ends over there today?

Schlesinger: We have 11 choppers at Utapao. We can run operations against the vessel. In addition, we can land on the island with 120 Marines. We can support that with the force from Okinawa. All together, we would have 270 Marines. In all probability, we could take the island. The Marines estimate that there might be about 100 Cambodians on the island. We would prefer to land with 1,000.

President: If you do not do it during this daylight, you have a delay. How long would it be?

Schlesinger: 24 hours. We do not have the HOLT there yet. The HOLT will arrive at noon tomorrow our time. If it is to do anything, I would prefer to wait until the first light on the 15th. Until the CORAL SEA arrives, all we can use are the helicopters at Utapao.

Kissinger: How would the Marines get down?

Jones: On ladders.

Schlesinger: The helicopters would hover.

Kissinger: But if there are 100 troops on the island, why do we not attack it?

President: In this daylight cycle, you could put 120 on the ships, and 270 on the island?

Jones: The total lift is 270. Our plan was to seize the ship with 120, and then to use the Marines from Okinawa to try to go on the island.



It is hazardous to go onto the island with this first group because you do not have time to recycle. We would have to let them remain there overnight, against a force that we do not know.

Kissinger: Does the CORAL SEA have helicopters?

Jones: No. It has only two or so that it uses itself. But we could take the Marines on to the CORAL SEA, and thus get them close to the island.

Kissinger: I understand we only have 11 choppers.

Colby: Couldn't the 270 protect themselves against the force on the island?

Jones: We have nothing to confirm the exact force on that island.

Kissinger: I do not see what we gain by going on with that force tonight. If you sink the boats in the area, and all who approach, it does not matter if we have anybody else on the island. At that point, nothing will be moving.

My instinct would be to wait for the HOLT and the CORAL SEA. You can then work with the Marines from the CORAL SEA. Nothing can happen in the meantime. Then I would assemble a force and really move vigorously.

President: In other words, the time you gain in this cycle is not worth the gamble.

Kissinger: Later you can do more. It might work with the 270. But it is a risk. It should be decisive and it should look powerful.

Jones: But it cannot be in 24 hours, only in 48. Once you start cycling, it takes time.

Schlesinger: I think that Henry (Kissinger) is thinking of going tomorrow night.

Rumsfeld: But you have only a few hours left of daylight.



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Jones: That would not be enough.

Schlesinger: We need the morning of the 16th for a coordinated assault.

Kissinger: We are talking about 48 hours.

President: In other words, you are talking about Thursday night our time.

Jones: On Wednesday night, the CORAL SEA will help a little with its fighters. But not with Marines. Maybe the HANCOCK will do it.

Kissinger: You also have the HOLT.

Jones: With the CORAL SEA, you have other vessels as well. You will have a total of five ships. You would have a good force, but it is very late at night to begin to cycle the Marines.

Colby: Our estimate was that there were 2,000 in Kompong Som. There is not a large force on the island.

President: Do you think we can figure with 100?

Colby: Yes. The KC have just arrived in power. They have probably not had time to man the island more fully.

Clements: In the time frame that you are talking about, there will not be an island worth taking. All the Americans will be gone.

President: Not if we knock out the boats. Unless, of course, they leave at night.

Clements: Right. I think they will get out. The HOLT will protect the ship. But that is not what matters. I doubt that there will be anything on the island.

Rumsfeld: Can we not use flares for this?

Jones: The main thing we use at night is infra-red. We can read it at night. The P-3's also have searchlights and flares.



Rumsfeld: The P-3's should be good at keeping the boat under control.

Jones: Yes, unless the weather is bad.

Clements: The small boats can get through. You cannot get control.

Colby: The KC may say something soon.

President: It seems that at a minimum we should wait for the next daylight cycle, with the HOLT getting there.

Kissinger: The HOLT will be there then.

President: Right. Is it the unanimous view that we should withhold action until after the CORAL SEA has a full day there?

Schlesinger: I think you should wait.

Colby: This is not my business. I do not think you should go tonight. But I worry about what might happen later. If they get locked in, if they take reprisals, it would be very difficult for us.

Clements: I would like to take a middle position. Once the HOLT gets there, we will have some control. We can do a great deal.

Colby: I think that with the Marines, you have to go soon.

Kissinger: I am very leery about that operation using ladders.

Schlesinger: If there is token resistance on the island, the Marines can handle it. If there is more, they can try to lock in and get more Marines to land the next day, with the HOLT for additional support. It is a close call. There are the pressures of time. It is also possible that the Cambodians will decide to execute our men.

Colby: Once we take that ship, the clock is ticking.



Clements: The HOLT can get them, by speaking to them with loud-speakers. It can let them know our position.

Kissinger: But that is not the issue. We should not look as though people can localize an issue. We have to use the opportunity to prove that others will be worse off if they tackle us, and not that they can return to the status quo.

It is not just enough to get the ship's release. Using one aircraft carrier, one destroyer, and 1,000 Marines to get the ship out is not much. I think we should seize the island, seize the ship, and hit the mainland. I am thinking not of Cambodia, but of Korea and of the Soviet Union and of others. It will not help you with the Congress if they get the wrong impression of the way we will act under such circumstances.

As for the 270 Marines, it had several components. There is an advantage in speed. The problem is if anything goes wrong, as often does, I think against 100 KC you would lose more Americans because you do not have overwhelming power. I am assuming we will not negotiate. We must have an unconditional release. On balance, I would like to get a more reliable force.

Clements: If you want the ship and the Americans, why not let the HOLT do it? Let the HOLT broadcast that if the Americans are not released, all hell will break loose.

Kissinger: What would hell mean in a case like that?

President: Let's do an add-on to Colby's suggestion. The HOLT is there. You land 270 Marines. You bomb the airport at Sihanoukville.

Colby: My schedule is to land the Marines today.

Schlesinger: Until the CORAL SEA gets there, we have only the aircraft from Thailand. The inhibitions on the use of the aircraft from Thailand are greater.

President: No, you have the B-52's on Guam. They can be used.

Colby: If you knock out every boat, you have effectiveness.



Kissinger: That is still localizing it. We will not get that many chances.
As Jim says, it would exacerbate the Thai problem.

President: If we order the Marines to go from Utapao, we could get 270 in there.

Jones: That was before we lost two helicopters on SAR. I would urge against going this daylight. The Marines would just be landing at Utapao. The helicopter pilots would be tired. Nobody would be mated up yet. It would be a difficult operation to be launching at that time, especially since we could not follow up the same day.

Kissinger: If you were to give the orders now, Mr. President, there would still be some hours of delay before the messages were received and before the preparations were made. By then we would really only have three more hours of daylight left in order to conduct the operation.

President: So we rule out any action on this daylight cycle. Then, on the next day, the HOLT gets there. We then have some more options. The CORAL SEA, however, doesn't get there until the next cycle.

Kissinger: If you wait 24 more hours, you have the HOLT and you also have the fact that you can use 270 Marines.

Jones: And, in fact, you have 250 more than you can put in. You also have the CORAL SEA.

Kissinger: I am not sure that I would let the HOLT go up against the vessel. It may be best to keep the HOLT where it can blockade the island. Then we can seize the island.

Schlesinger: I agree with Kissinger. But we have to keep in mind that there are forces on the island. That gives them time to prepare. It also gives them time to scuttle the ship.

Kissinger: But they can still scuttle the ship, even with the HOLT alongside. If we could seize the ship quickly, I would agree. I did not know that the HOLT could board.

President: Unless sailors are different now, they are not good boarders.



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ORIGINAL RETURN TO CONSERVATION

Schlesinger: Could any Marines do it?

Jones: We could get the Marines on the ship, but then we could not use them for other things.

The suggestion is to go with the first light on the 15th, to get the HOLT and to hold the island.

Kissinger: My suggestion is to seize the island. We cannot do anything tonight. By tomorrow morning, we can put the Marines on the HOLT. They can operate. I would go for the island at daybreak of the 15th.

Schlesinger: The problem with that is that the CORAL SEA will not be there. If you want an overwhelming force on the island, you should wait until the 16th.

Kissinger: The ideal time for what I have in mind is the 16th. That would not just include the island but Kompong Som, the airport and boats.

President: If you wait until the 16th, you have maximum capability. But the people in Utapao should be prepared to operate as soon as the HOLT gets there, at 11:30 tomorrow night. The Marines should be alerted.

Kissinger: The HOLT gets there at noon tomorrow. So we can go from first light. We could seize the island and the ship. That, however, would not give us the CORAL SEA for such operations as we would wish to run against Kompong Som.

Schlesinger: You can get 250 Marines in helicopters.

Colby: That would mean 500 in two cycles.

President: The operational orders should be set up so that the HOLT and the Marines can go. We do not know what will happen in 24 hours. They have options also. We can make a decision tomorrow if we want to. But we should have orders ready to go so that they can move within 24 hours. That would be for the HOLT, the Marines, and the B-52's.

Rumsfeld: When would it start, then?



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ORIGINAL RETURN TO THE DONATION

Kissinger: At 2200 hours tomorrow. I think that when we move, we should hit the mainland as well as the island. We should hit targets at Kompong Som and the airfield and say that we are doing it to suppress any supporting action against our operations to regain the ship and seize the island.

If the B-52's can do it, I would like to do it tomorrow night. Forty-eight hours are better militarily. But so much can happen, domestically and internationally. We have to be ready to take the island and the ship and to hit Kompong Som.

President: I think we should be ready to go in 24 hours. We may, however, want to wait.

Schlesinger: We will be prepared to go on the morning of the 15th. We will see if we can get the Marines on the HOLT. At first light, we will have plans to go to the island. Simultaneously, we will go for the ship.

We will have the B-52's at Guam ready to go for Kompong Som. But I think there are political advantages to using the aircraft from the CORAL SEA. You will have more problems on the Hill with the B-52's from Guam.

Vice President: Why?

Schlesinger: The B-52's are a red flag on the Hill. Moreover, they bomb a very large box and they are not so accurate. They might generate a lot of casualties outside the exact areas that we would want to hit.

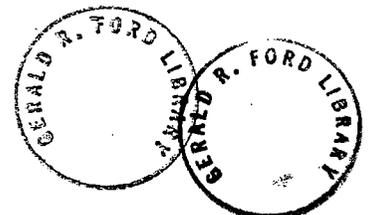
President: Let's see what the chiefs say is better, the aircraft from the carrier or the B-52's. It should be their judgment.

Kissinger: But the CORAL SEA would delay us 24 hours.

Rumsfeld: But do we have to wait for the CORAL SEA actually to arrive?

Scowcroft: No. Their planes can operate at considerable distance.

President: On the 15th, we can use the B-52's from Guam. On the 16th, we also have the aircraft from the CORAL SEA.



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ORIGINAL PAPER PRESERVATION

Jones: Except, if you use the CORAL SEA, it limits some assets. Everybody is now on alert. We can do it when you say. We are ready to go.

Rumsfeld: Is it not possible that the CORAL SEA aircraft could strike Cambodia even when the CORAL SEA is still hours away?

Schlesinger: I'm not sure it would be close enough. Let me check.

Rumsfeld: The CORAL SEA could be there near that time.

Schlesinger: Let me check.

President: You may have an operational problem. If you have to turn the carrier into the wind in order to dispatch and recover aircraft, you may lose time.

Schlesinger: Yes, but if you go for the 15th, you do not need its presence so soon if you can use the aircraft from a distance.

Kissinger: What do we have on the CORAL SEA?

Jones: We have fighter aircraft, including F-4's and A-7's.

Kissinger: Would they be more accurate than the B-52's?

Jones: Not necessarily. It depends on the type of target.

Buchen: I see two problems:

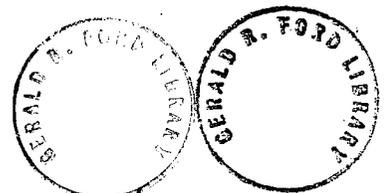
-- The first is Cooper-Church Amendment.

-- The second is international law.

President: On international law, I do not think we have a problem. They have clearly violated it.

Buchen: We have the right of self-defense, but only self-defense. The Cooper-Church Amendment says no actions in Indochina.

Kissinger: I think you can legitimately say that our aircraft are suppressing hostile action against our operation.



President: We cannot be that concerned in this instance.

Marsh: This afternoon, we had the NSC prepare a paper saying what we would do. It showed that you would use force in general terms. The reaction from the people we talked to was very favorable.

Clements: I hate to have us lose sight of our objectives in this case. Those objectives are to get the Americans and the ship. If we want to punish people, that's another thing. I think that dropping a lot of bombs on the mainland will not help us with the release of the Americans.

President: I think we have to assume that the Americans were taken from the island and that some were killed. This is tragic, but I think that we have to assume that it happened. Does anybody disagree?

(General expressions of agreement.)

Vice President: At a briefing yesterday, Congressman Zablocki, one of the proponents of the War Powers Act, said that he would tell the press that the U. S. could bomb the hell out of them.

Schlesinger: We are not inhibited by the War Powers Act, only by Cooper-Church.

Colby: We think there are about three T-28's at Kompong Som airfield. They could use them. So there is a potential threat at Kompong Som against our forces.

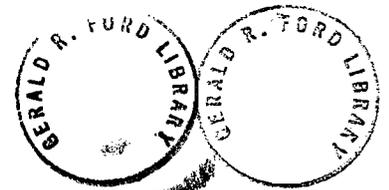
President: Can we verify this?

Colby: This is from a photograph taken on the 12th.

Rumsfeld: How are those aircrafts equipped?

Colby: With bombs and guns.

Kissinger: I think the worst stance is to follow Phil's concern. If we only respond at the same place at which we are challenged, nobody can lose by challenging us. They can only win.



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ORIGINAL RETURN TO DECLASSIFICATION

This means, I think, that we have to do more. The Koreans and others would like to look us over and to see how we react. Under certain circumstances, in fact, some domestic cost is to our advantage in demonstrating the seriousness with which we view this kind of challenge.

President: Phil and I have argued for years.

Buchen: I have to state the problems that we face.

President: In this daylight cycle, unless something unusual comes up, we will try to prevent boats going to and from the island.

Kissinger: The latest intelligence shows that there are several small patrol boats near the island in the cove. I think we should sink them.

President: I agree.

Schlesinger: There are four boats.

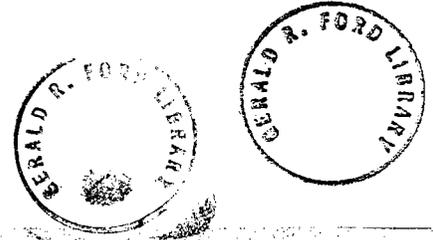
President: I think we should sink any boats that can be used to try to move the Americans.

Rumsfeld: But not the ones that carry Americans.

Schlesinger: I disagree with Henry in one case. The legal situation in Indochina is unique. We should emphasize that. The restraints of our actions are different from the restraints anywhere else.

Kissinger: I would hit, and then deal with the legal implications.

President: Bill (Colby) should verify that the T-28's are there. At the second daylight cycle, we are prepared to do more. The HOLT will be there and the Marines will be ready to go on it and to be put on the island, with the B-52's and perhaps the aircraft from the CORAL SEA prepared to strike Kompong Som. But, unless there is some unusual development, the actual action will take place 24 hours later.



Schlesinger: On the 16th.

Kissinger: You can decide it then.

President: The preferable time is 24 hours later.

Kissinger: That is when the best forces will be available. But that has to be weighed against other considerations for the extra 24 hours that you lose. I remember 1969, when the EC-121 was shot down off Korea. We assembled forces like crazy. But in the end, we did not do anything. Maybe we shouldn't have. We will never know.

Colby: There is one other justifiable target in the Kompong Som area. The old Cambodian Government had 25 patrol boats in the Ream Naval Base.

(The President, Kissinger, and Schlesinger almost simultaneously remark along the lines that that might be a worthwhile target.)

Schlesinger: But this sort of thing would require the gunships out of Thailand.

Kissinger: I think we should do something that will impress the Koreans and the Chinese. I saw Teng Hsiao-Ping's comments in Paris.

President: Are there an airfield and a naval base there at Kompong Som?

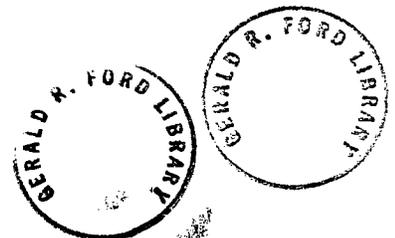
Colby: Yes.

President: Why not hit both of them? There would be as many objections to hitting one as two of them.

Schlesinger: The question is whether you use the B-52's or the carrier aircraft. The B-52's may represent the best image for what Henry is trying to accomplish. But, for Congress and others, other aircraft would be better.

President: Bill has to verify what there is at the airport.

Schlesinger: We'll put some T-28's on the base.



President: Tomorrow, we will still have the options as to what we should do.

Jones: On Guam, if we are to do anything, we have to start pretty soon. But there are lots of press there.

Rumsfeld: You would be launching at about 4:00 p.m. tomorrow.

Kissinger: How long does it take to load?

Jones: There are many planes to load and to get ready.

Kissinger: Is the first thing tomorrow still time enough?

Jones: I'm not sure.

President: Are there any others in the Far East?

Jones: Only at Utapao.

President: We do not want that.

Rumsfeld: It should not take long to calculate the answer on the question of using the CORAL SEA.

Vice President: Everybody wants to know when you are moving. In New York, where I just was, people expect you to be doing things. So any steps you take in preparation will be understood.

President: How many B-52's would you use?

Jones: Perhaps 6 or 9.

President: Let's say 9. How many do you have on Guam?

Jones: I am not sure. About 20 or more.

President: Every time I have looked at a B-52 base, they are always doing something. It should not be that unusual. I think you should load them, and get them ready.

Jones: There are about 50 reporters on Guam right now, because of the refugees.



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Kissinger: Can you tell the commander to shut up?

Schlesinger: It will get out, no matter how hard you try.

Vice President: Perhaps it would be good to have it get out. I don't think we should cavil.

President: Let's have them get ready to carry out the mission if we decide to do it.

Hartmann: I am not an expert on military affairs. I am just an old retired captain in the Reserve. I have been listening in terms of what the American public wants. I think the American public wants to know what you are going to do.

This crisis, like the Cuban missile crisis, is the first real test of your leadership. What you decide is not as important as what the public perceives.

Nothing, so far as I know, has gone out to the public so far, except that we are taking steps. It may be that we should let the public know something of the steps that you are taking. The public will judge you in accordance with what you do. We should not just think of what is the right thing to do, but of what the public perceives.

Kissinger: I would say nothing until afterwards. That will speak for itself. Then you can explain what you have been doing.

If you say something now, everybody will be kibitzing.

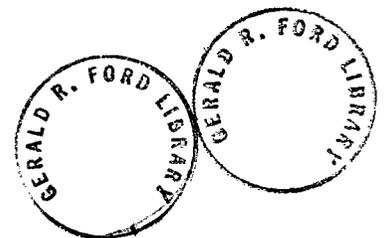
President: But the press should know of the NSC meeting.

Hartmann: I think we should consider what the people think we are doing.

Rumsfeld: The delay worries me.

Hartmann: Yes.

Kissinger: If we are going to do an integrated attack, I think we have to go in 22 hours. We should not wait for a later cycle.



I cannot judge if there would be a problem in taking the island. We're saying that it will be one annihilating blow. I cannot judge if 270 Marines can do it.

Rumsfeld: There would 500.

Kissinger: But there will be 270 for four hours. They will have the HOLT support. Perhaps they will also have some support from the CORAL SEA.

President: Do we have Marines on the CORAL SEA?

Jones: I'm not sure.

Kissinger: If the CORAL SEA can launch against Kompong Som, it can launch against the island. We have to be sure that the landing has a chance of success.

Jones: The probability that the Americans are gone causes the problem. I think we have a high probability.

Kissinger: Then my instinct is with Rummy. We should go tomorrow night or earlier.

President: Everything will be ready. But, if you do it in the next cycle, you have the problem of Thailand.

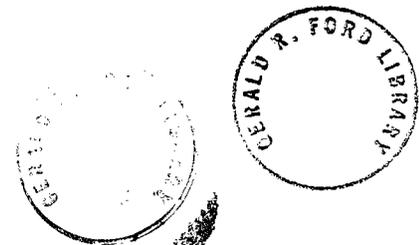
Kissinger: The ideal time would be Thursday night. But I am worried that in the next 48 hours some diplomatic pressure will occur, or something else. So we have to weigh the optimum military time against the optimum political time. For foreign policy and domestic reasons, tomorrow is better.

President: The Thai will be upset.

Kissinger: That is correct, but they will also be reassured.

Rumsfeld: Can we be sure there is anybody on the island? We might just take a walk.

Kissinger: If the Americans are on the mainland, then we have to rethink.



Rumsfeld: If we look at this tonight, we will know tomorrow.

President: If Jones goes back to the Pentagon tonight with the orders to prepare, we will have details tomorrow.

Jones: Everything is now moving, except the B-52's.

Ingersoll: What is the flying time of the B-52's?

Kissinger: About 6 hours.

Jones: Maybe longer.

Schlesinger: Can we tanker them out of Guam?

Jones: Yes.

Kissinger: What will we say about the boats that have been sunk?

Buchen: We have to make a report to the Hill.

Schlesinger: It may not get out that quickly.

President: My answer would be, that we have ordered that no enemy boats should leave the island or go out to it, but that if they did, they would be sunk.

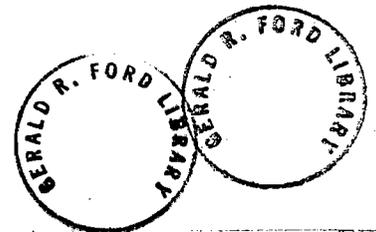
Kissinger: I think a low-key press statement can be issued, saying what has happened. We should tell the truth. We should say it in a very matter-of-fact way, at a DOD briefing.

Schlesinger: It will not stay low-key.

President: The order was issued that no boats should leave.

Kissinger: We should say nothing about the riot control agents. We should say that there were Americans possibly being moved, and that lives were at stake. Some Americans are still on the island. In pursuit of these objectives, the following boats were sunk.

One other reason is that it is not inconceivable that the Khmers will cave, and they should come in response to something that we had done.



Schlesinger: Should we say that they were sunk from aircraft from Thailand? That is your problem.

Kissinger: I am worried about it getting out of hand. We will look sneaky and furtive about something we should be proud of.

But the Thai thing does give me trouble. I think the Thai military will love it. But the Thai Government will say that it does not like it.

The Liberals on the Hill will put forward a recommendation to withdraw our forces from Thailand. They will match this with some requests from the Thai Government.

Rumsfeld: I think that is a good issue.

Hartmann: Bob Byrd, whom I regard as a good antenna of sentiment, says that we should act.

Marsh: Case says we should go in.

Vice President: In our statement, should we not call them launches?

Schlesinger: The boats are of different sizes.

Kissinger: I would urge that the spokesman make a short announcement at noon tomorrow. He should explain why we are doing it. He should say that it was ordered by you, executed by the National Security Council, and then answer no other questions. This would be noon. By 8 o'clock, we will have decided the other. That will add to your strength.

(General concurrence.)

END OF MEETING

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