

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~SECRET~~/NODIS/XGDS

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: President Nixon
Elliot Richardson, Secretary of Defense
The Joint Chiefs of Staff
Major General Brent Scowcroft, Deputy Assistant
to the President for National Security Affairs

DATE AND TIME: Thursday, February 15, 1973
1:00 p.m.

PLACE: The Pentagon

President: You know, I am known as following a "hard line," and in the Presidential campaign my opponent took a soft line.

Without the ABM, we would not have had a SALT agreement. In addition, there were many in Congress who wanted to "bug out" from Vietnam, and there were many close votes on that issue. Had those efforts succeeded, our POWs would have come home to a defeated country.

What I'm getting at is the growing strength of isolationism in the United States. This tendency is fed by the information media. But still, thank God we don't have government television, putting out just one line.

Other countries have to have the support of the peaceniks to survive. During the recent bombing, the only ones to stand with us were the British, the Germans, and the Turks. All the others took a cheap shot at the bombing. Trudeau, Tanaka, Schmidt. The bombings in World War II killed millions but that was a "good war." This is a "bad war," so the bombing was "evil." There is a real double standard, and isolationism is rampant.

Clinking glasses with the Chinese and the Soviet leaders wasn't friendship but mutual interests. We talk to both countries, not to divide them but to seek sound relations with them. We must realize, however,

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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5
NSC Memo, 11/24/98, State Dept. Guidelines
By GA, NARA, Date 1/18/00

that good relations don't come simply from knowing other people better.

There is a tendency in the rimland of Asia and elsewhere to tell the U.S. to go home. But Indonesia and Suharto don't. Should this develop in the NATO countries, or should they reduce their forces, the Congress will jump at the chance to cut all NATO forces. We are in danger of not getting enough from Congress, and Europe will encourage these forces which will want us to come home. We would like to be able to put the DOD budget into welfare, but if we did, the world would eventually fall under the Communist system. Despite the setback in South Asia and pressure from Congress, the situation is not hopeless. That is what the Chinese and Soviet initiatives were all about. Expansion is an article of Communist faith, but so also is caution.

The Korean War was not about Korea, but basically about Japan. The U.S. stand in Korea was a water shed. So it is with Vietnam, although the domino theory is rejected. Vietnam was important not for itself but because of what it demonstrated in terms of support for our friends and allies and in terms of showing our will to our enemies. We had to see it through. I could have "bugged out" free in Vietnam after the '68 election, but we had to see it through -- but not necessarily the way it had been fought up to them. We have made strong moves in such crises as Jordan, Cienfuegos, etc. All these were important in demonstrating our commitments to our friends and our determination to our enemies.

I understand what vilification you, the military, have gone through over Vietnam, but you should remember that the big issue in the war was the American spirit.

I will conclude by saying that we must regain the respect for our military or we will end up with a country and a world which is unsafe. We must also remember and honor our POWs, our MIAs, all those killed or all those who served honorably in Vietnam.

Richardson: Thank you, Mr. President. You have put all our war commitments into proper perspective. The returning POWs have dramatically launched what DOD is trying to do to restore the military to its proper position. What more should be done for the POWs?

President: I raised the issue because I want to have the initiative. Congress might even say, "Give them all the Medal of Honor."



Adm. Moorer: The JCS have examined the idea of some sort of Presidential citation for those who were certified by the Services as deserving. I recommend we call it a POW Citation for those who honorably served.

President: Continue to think about this and develop a plan for appropriate recognition of the POWs for some sort of an award presentation in Washington. We should make it an individual rather than unit citation. I plan to invite POWs for dinner, and invitations would be extended to their wives or mothers. All of you should be there.

If too many stories come out about the bad treatment accorded our POWs, we could jeopardize the chances of getting aid to North Vietnam through the Congress. This would give us leverage with the North Vietnamese. It's important for our strategy. If the POWs rejected the idea of such aid, that would kill it in Congress.

Adm. Moorer: We will take care of this problem.

President: You all should talk privately to the "Hawks" in Congress -- like Long, Stennis, Goldwater -- to convince them of the necessity of aiding North Vietnam on a national interest basis, not through any idea of reparation or humanitarianism. Aid to North Vietnam should be pushed as an investment in peace. The leverage issue should not be specifically developed in discussions with Congress. I'm afraid the doves will oppose it because they think it would come out of welfare. Senator Mansfield is at least an "honest peacenik." I think he supports aid to North Vietnam.

Howard K. Smith has some good comments on this. But to go back to the POWs, I think we should attempt to keep those who are fit in the Services. The unfit, handle on a case-by-case basis. We don't want stories that they can't get jobs. Each Service should follow each man individually. They should be returned to the Service with an appropriate promotion, or found a job. They should, of course, receive the best possible medical care.

General Abrams: There is an Army POW who was released at least two years ago, who has been given everything possible but who can't hold a job. He enjoys being a hero. Some people just cannot be helped.

President: If any POW wanted government jobs, they should go through Scowcroft to Haldeman.



Richardson: Mr. President, I propose a toast to you and to your leadership and strength of purpose. [All toast.]

President: I have ordered a white orchid for each of the POWs' wives or mothers for them to wear in greeting their husbands or sons. Mrs. Nixon and you should do this. We don't want to exploit the POWs but to do what is appropriate.

We now have an invaluable opportunity to revise the history of this war. For eight years the press has called the Vietnam war immoral and those who went to Canada the moral ones. The amnesty people don't want forgiveness; they want justification.

Of course, on amnesty, there is the Lincoln precedent. But it's not an issue of vengeance or nonvengeance, simply justice.

One other point. I also want to stress that this will be the year of Europe, and we should, within the next two months, review NATO strategy.

I want to emphasize that I want not just a consensus but a variety of views on ground strategy for the years ahead. The State Department knew diplomacy not strategy, and the Defense Department vice versa. Fortunately, Elliot combines the knowledge of both fields. The Defense Department is full of smart people. It's important to let them know we need them and intend to use them.

There are a number of areas that need to be studied, such as our posture in Southeast Asia after Vietnam; Indonesia -- military and or more economic aid; Korea; the Fleet; the Middle East, Indian Ocean, and the energy crisis, for example.

I think the Nixon Doctrine has been largely misinterpreted. Mansfield, for example, thinks that it is a way to get out. It's not; it's a way to maintain our forces overseas but to get a decent effort from the countries supported, especially in terms of manpower. I want Defense involved, as well as State, in the upcoming study efforts.

Richardson: I have ordered a meeting to work out what we are doing, what are the gaps, and what we don't need to do again.

President: We will pay attention to your views.



Adm. Moorer: There are \$5 a day in war claims. We'll take no initiative, but don't propose it.

President: If Congress proposes, we won't oppose it unless it is outlandish.



Pres Lunch at Defense

2/15/73

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You know I am known as hard
line & in campaign of present took
a soft line.

W/o ABM we would have had to pull out.

Many close votes in Cong. Many
Cong wanted a buy out. Had we done
that, our POW's would have come
home to deserted country.

What's getting at is getting strength
of institutions - there & we in
the world. Fed by media. (I think
God we don't have govt TV, as/only not
here.)

Other countries have to have support
of procedures to survive. For buying,
only ones to stand w/ us were B, G, & T,
all others, etc. So we took a
strong shot.



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T. Wickham, T. Wickham, Schmidt.
US will bombing killed ^{500,000} ~~100,000~~ -
but that was just war, this is
bad war. Double standard.
Relations is rampant.

Clanking glasses w/ PRC + USSR want
friendship, not interests. We talk
to both - not to divide them, but
to seek good relations w/ them - but
good relations don't come simply from
knowing each other.

There is a tendency in a number of
Asia & elsewhere to say US go home
- make decisions & withdraw from
NATO reduce or people say go home,
Congress will jump at a chance
we are in danger of not getting
enough from Congress, it may
will discourage those forces

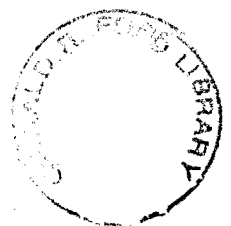


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which will want us to come home.
We'd like to put Dad and get into
welfare, but if our child, I would
would find make most together.
Situation is not together, that is
what P.C. + USSR intentions are
about. Article of most faith is
Japan, but also Center.

~~Japan~~
Korea was not about Korea,
but Japan. Starting in Korea was
a watershed.

So w/ VN, ~~and~~ at the dinner
they rejected. We had to do it
then. (Not necessarily way it was
fought). Because of our friends &
allies around I could - I could
have begged out free.



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- Also maintained respect of our
interests.

Let's strong moves in Jordan,
Cyprus, etc. We have to
demonstrate our will.

I know what indications you
have gone thru. But remember,
it is not just about us. It is
about world, + most importantly,
about American spirit.

We must regain faith + respect
in our military or we will have
a country + a world which is
unsafe.

Must remember POW's even lost,
men saved, all.

R - you know first our whole
commitment into proper time



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Pow's bound to almost automatically
chronologically committed & what
we are trying to do is restore
military

what more to do for POWs.

P. I would like, because one has
to have initiative - Congress might
say give them Medal of Honor

M - We have expressed projects of
Pres. citation:

Those certified by Service
(Don't give to any unclassified)

P - MIA's. For a family who had
long vigil, perhaps a letter.

P - Can't make it an
initial rather than a unit
citation.

M - Recommend we call it a POW



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Citation for those who bravely
served

P - Continue to think about this
& bring a plan.

Presentation to be in Washington
I will invite them for drinks
& lunch & mother. All of you
will be there

P. d. to handle this issue.
By the way, streets come out
about bad treatment, and may
jeopardize chances of getting
out to NARA

XV (Eugene's philosophy of love)
of Power's sudden oil for NARA,
that would kill it.

M - We will take care of it.



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P - Use leverage argument as
long in the sense: an
investment in power. Let
every group at a leverage.
Doesn't will oppose because it
will come out of ~~the~~ welfare.
Manfield is distrust about being
promoted ~~promote~~ ~~promote~~, he
suggests and.

You all should take talk
priority to the chances to sell
C and (Stines, Goldwater) sell
on net interest basis, not
soft hearted ones.
Howard Smith has some good
comments on this.



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P-O is jobs. Let's keep those fit
in service. Skipped, handle
on costly case basis. No
stories that they can't get a job.
Each service to follow each man.
Back into service w/ or w/o
promotion also job.
Also best medical care.

A- We have a man who's released
2 yrs ago. We have given him
everything, but can't hold a job.
He enjoys being a bus.
Some job can't help

P- If any want govt jobs, go thru
Munt Halderman

R- Toast to P+ his leadership
+ strength of purpose



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P- Article critical for arms (Vers N
& conditions)

We don't want to exploit Pors,
but to do what is appropriate. It
is enormous opportunity to send
a history of this war. For 8 yrs
the press had called us a man
murderer & that those who went
to Canada are a moral ones.

Amnesty people don't want
for justice, they want justification
Amnesty patch - finish, not
for vengeance, etc.

One attempt - year of Europe.

✓ We in 60 days we had to
get with NATO strategy.
I want not only concerns, but



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also a variety of means of
grand strategy for years ahead.
State knows diplomacy not
strategy, DoD vice versa.
E left combines both.

DoD has some people. We want
them to know we would use them
What is our SEA posture after
VN. Indonesia - will aid, or
more sea aid.
Korea?
Fleet?
Indian Ocean
Every crisis
Middle East.



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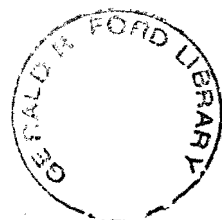
Nixon doctrine - largely mis-
interpreted. Mansfield
thinks it is way to get out.
It is a way to stay in, but get
a decent effort of locals, train-
people.

I want DOD involved (& State)

R - I have ordered an inventory
of what we are doing, what we
have gaps & what we don't need
to do again

P - we will pay attention to your
views.

M - \$5 per day was claimed.
Take no instruction, but don't



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Propose.
P - If Congress proposes, we
cannot oppose unless it
is outlandish.

