

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

JOINT LEADERSHIP MEETING

DATE: Early April, 1975

PLACE: The Cabinet Room

PARTICIPANTS: President Ford
Secretary of State Kissinger
Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft

Senator Hugh Scott
Rep. George Mahon
Rep. Broomfield
Rep. Anderson
Rep. John Anderson
Rep. Thomas O'Neill
Rep. Philip Burton
Rep. Thomas Morgan
Rep. Elford Cedarburg
Rep. Curtis
Rep. Robert Michel
Rep. Wilson
Rep. Barber Conable

The President: I can only say it will be a strong, frank speech. It will be justified, as I see it, on the facts. I will not recommend a phony.

I think we are at a serious turning point in foreign policy. We have some excellent successes and serious setbacks. I think if we cooperate we can move forward from past successes to the future. But in doing this, I have to be perfectly frank.

This country has too great a destiny for us to allow finger painting between the Executive Branch and Congress. There will be recommendations for humanitarian aid.

I would be glad to hear from any of you.

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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5

NSC Memo, 11/24/98, State Dept. Guidelines

By lit, NARA, Date 1/20/02



Scott: Are you leaving the door open for the step-by-step approach in the Middle East?

The President: I would prefer you wait until the speech. What do you recommend?

Scott: I would leave the door open because I think they all think they have something to lose at Geneva.

The President: When we were working on a step-by-step, everyone wanted to go to Geneva. Now everyone doesn't want to go to Geneva. That's what we tried to say.

O'Neill: We just came from there. Sadat said he is willing to go back, but what have they got to offer? Israel said the same -- they can't offer more. Both of them said they would go back, but had no more to give.

Anderson: I didn't observe any disinclination from either side about going to Geneva.

The President: Perhaps I might add something on the Mediterranean. There has been a long struggle on Cyprus and Greece and Turkey. We hear the situation between Greece and Turkey is going beyond Cyprus. That ain't good, fellows. That ain't good.

Kissinger: One problem is Turkey's incentive to do something before their spares run out. The Greeks are putting forces on islands for the first time. Turkey now has a government, so they may be willing to take action.

Scott: All of the Europeans are worried about U. S. troop reductions. With the situation in Portugal, we can't do this.

The President: Nobody had any sympathy for 50 years of dictatorship. But it is no help going from a dictatorship of the right to a dictatorship of the left. There is an impact on NATO, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, and the Middle East. I don't want to paint a bleak picture, but we have serious problems and what is required is a strong partnership with you. What could be an era of peace and strength could also be an era of great seriousness.

I will say in the speech that we need a strong defense budget. We need the strength to meet any of these contingencies.



Michel: Would you emphasize the need for strength to back up negotiations?

Burton: Can you tell us what steps you are taking with respect to the 6,000 Americans left in Vietnam?

Kissinger: We have two problems: Not to trigger a collapse or anti-American riots. We are laying plans. After the President speaks, our Ambassador is to tell President Thieu what it is we intend. If he did it before, it could trigger panic and jeopardize lives. We will accelerate Friday, but don't say anything now.

The President: I have ordered a thinning-out in Cambodia and we are now down to the bare minimum. The situation is bleak, to say the least, but they are still fighting.

O'Neill: What about the 150,000 -- 200,000 friends we have in South Vietnam?

The President: That will in fact be a serious problem. I will bring it out in my speech but it is too sensitive to discuss the details now.

Broomfield: I support Hugh Scott's statements, but I think we have to stress the need for bipartisan foreign policy. That is where our problem is.

Burton: The dilemma on the Defense budget is that individuals see the way to save their pet projects by cutting defense. I don't know what the solution is.

The President: I certainly understand that problem. But as we look at the problems of the world, now is not the time to cut it. It is a lot of money, but it clearly is the main interest now.

Please say the least you can. Don't talk Greek-Turkey problems. Don't discuss contingency plans. The least said the better.

Conable: One thing which scares me is the threat of anti-American actions in Vietnam. The aid is in enough trouble without some anti-American action -- that would really turn off the American people. What can we do not to accelerate the sense of frustration?

The President: If you went out and said the situation was hopeless and we were pulling Americans out, that would trigger it. If they think we have given up, that will set them off.



Mahon: I think we shouldn't talk about the danger to the 150-200 people. My final hearing on the supplemental is scheduled for tomorrow. This is the time for an addition if we are going to -- there is not much chance.

The President: Can you delay until Friday? If not, do it on the floor next week.

Cedarburg: Has any assessment been made of our inability to help 150,000 in Vietnam and what it does for our credibility? It must be near zero.

Kissinger: It is not near zero, but it has hurt. It has had an impact on the Middle East situation. We have seen signs in Japan. But there is nothing we can do about that. If we can salvage something, move forward and not load things like the Turkish amendment on us. It is nonsense to say we lose credibility only if we say so. We have suffered a setback.

Cedarburg: People say we should go to the North Vietnamese and talk.

Kissinger: We should stay out of this. However it comes, it should not be an American achievement. We can be in touch about evacuation, humanitarian aid.

Cedarburg: It would be a disaster to have 175,000 people massacred.

Kissinger: We can't say anything before the President speech because we have no chips with which to negotiate.

Morgan: I am surprised at people now who say they would vote for additional aid. Is it hopeless?

The President: It is less than 50-50. They are trying to put together their broken forces and upgrade their regional forces. It is potentially salvagable. I would not rule that out.

Anderson: Fraser said he is willing to vote aid to stabilize the situation if we would move to install a leader in Vietnam who might have a chance to negotiate.

The President: There is much milling around right now trying to find someone who might fill the bill. No one has appeared as yet.



Kissinger: Without a stabilized military situation, North Vietnamese demands are in fact to turn over the GVN to the North. On the other hand, the logic of the negotiation will be home in upon the people in Saigon. All we have to do is to stand aside. If we can stabilize the situation, the possibilities of something being developed in Saigon is great. The new Cabinet is supposed to contain all parties. Within the next 2-3 months I think something will happen.

Cedarburg: Why should North Vietnam negotiate?

Kissinger: If they see our executive and legislative pulling together, they may think it's better to talk. It wouldn't be a brilliant solution.

Wilson: General Weyand said if we give aid there was a chance; if not there was no chance; It is up to us.

Michel: In an up and down vote, there is no way to get it through the House, Maybe by a circuitous route.

The President: We will make a plea for humanitarian aid. One point -- there are refugees behind North Vietnamese lines. It strains my credibility to give aid to North Vietnam to free themselves to pursue the action which started the refugees. The refugees tried to flee North Vietnam. I can't see giving North Vietnam aid in light of this.

Michel: Or through the UN who haven't done a tinkers damn.

Curtis: What about these secret commitments?

The President: You have read the press statement we made. These communications coincide precisely with the substance of the US/GVN communiques. There is no commitment beyond what was said publicly.

Kissinger: There were two kinds of assurances: a reaction to violations and to give them adequate aid if the GVN let us take our forces out.

While Nixon objected to the bombing halt, he did not do it on the basis of a secret commitment. He never invoked a secret commitment. So with aid, it was a moral commitment and we have argued it at length but it was not a secret commitment.

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Joint Leadership Mtg
-mid-
Early April

P I can only say with the strong, frank speech.
will be justified, as I see it, as a fact. I will
not measure a penny
I think we at senior times, just in F.P. we have
had some excellent success & some setbacks.
I think if we keep our eyes forward for
just see what the future. But in doing this,
I want to be perfectly frank.
This country has too great a destiny for finger
pointing but express our. There will be room
for humanitarian aid.
I would be glad to have many of you.

S-att Are you having a brochure for step-by-step
re-
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wanted.

S-att I would have a discussion because I think all
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What could be an era of peace + strength could also
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an addition if we going to - not much chance.

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Secretary Has any assessment been made of our inability to help ~~that~~ 150,000 in VN & what it does for our credibility but must be near zero

K Not near zero, but it has hurt. It has had impact on ME site. We have seized in Jap. But there is nothing we can do about that. If we can salvage something, we'd forward & not deal things like Turk announced on us. Worse to say we have cred only if we say so. We have suffered a setback

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Secretary It would be disaster to have 175,000 people unassured.

K We can't say anything before I get to because we have no chips w/ which to negotiate.

Wagon Surprised at people now who say they would vote for additional aid. Is it hopeless?

P At less than 50-50. They trying to put together their broken faces & my grade their regional faces. It is potentially salvageable. I would not make that out.

Anderson Fraser said he willing to vote aid to floodlight a site if we would want to install a beam in



VN who might have chosen to negot.

P There is much writhing around right now trying to find someone who might fill - bills. We are less experienced yet.

K w/o stabilized mil sit, NVA demands are impact to them on GVN's work. On other hand, logic of negot will be done in regard people in Saigon. All we have to do is to stand aside. If we see a stabilize, a possibility of something being alleged in Saigon is great. The new cabinet is supposed to contain all parties w/in next 2-3 mos I think something will happen.

Richard Why should NVA negot?

K If they see exec + logic putting together, they may think it better to talk. It wouldn't be a brilliant solution.

Walter Why would you give aid if there was a chance; if not there was no chance. It is by the way.

Michael From my & others' view, there is no way to get it thru a House. Maybe a circumvent route.

P We will make plea for humanitarian aid. One point - that our refugees behind NVA line. It strikes my credibility to give aid to NVA to free themselves to pursue a action which started a refugee. I hope refugees tried to flee NVA. I can't see giving NVA aid in light of this.

Michael Or then - UN who haven't done a truck down.

Conrad What about secret contracts.

P (Read press statement)



These communications consist primarily of substance of US-G-VN communication. There is no content beyond what was said publicly.

R These were 2 kinds of assurances: one to moderation & adequate aid if G-VN let us take care of ourselves.

While N objected to a break halt, he did not do it on basis of content. So aid/aid. It is a moral content & we have argued it at length, but it was a secret content.

~~Condensed~~ Don't want to have a break halt as argument for aid. Make a case for stabilization to get support.

S with Are there any assurances of help from others

R We got help at Darnley, we have small informal representations

