

THM:Dfb
 CJCS Memo M-72-71
 23 September 1971

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subj: NSC Meeting, Monday, 20 September 1971 (U)

1. The meeting was held to review the situation in SVN. HELMS gave a rundown on the general situation from primarily a political point of view--CJCS outlined the military situation in Laos, Cambodia and SVN--emphasizing that the NVN did not have the capability, battalion size and larger, to conduct operations until they had restored their former logistics posture following the forthcoming Dry Season. Much discussion revolved around the forthcoming Presidential Election in SVN and all agreed that THIEU made a mistake in not accepting MINH and KY. The fact that there is no candidate to oppose THIEU has caused us considerable difficulty and has become a key factor in Congressional attitudes towards the war in Vietnam despite the fact that we were able to win approval of the extension of the Selective Service Act authority.
2. The Vice President noted that he believes, emotionally, the US is on the threshold of a resurgence of anti-war demonstrations. So far the acts by THIEU has stimulated movements which are a precursor of democracies.
3. The Vice President advised that we should stick with the current policy and not develop new initiatives at this time. SECDEF expressed his concern over the POWs and repeated the recent position provided by the CJCS in noting that there is no leverage on NVN left except the humanitarian one.
4. SECSTATE said we must forget about Paris and not highlight activities over there. Under no circumstances can we trade withdrawals for POWs.
5. The President commented that two-thirds of the countries which receive assistance from the US are not democracies and gave Greece as an example which is a country receiving straight aid. If we cut off aid to SVN we will cut off all aid, including that to Africa.
6. SECTREASURY agreed with the Vice President with respect to the potential up-surge of demonstrations, etc., but said he hopes he is wrong. He believes that most of the US people consider the Vietnam War over. We should take a position that we have a winning policy and that war or no war, we are against Communism in its aggressive role. The Vietnam War is simply an offshoot of the firm position taken in the US to stop Communist aggression.
7. SECDEF said that we should remember that during his first visit to Vietnam COMUSMACV (ABRAMS) asked if he could have 12-18 months--we have been winding down the war successfully now for almost three years.
8. SECDEF took this opportunity to emphasize to the President and, incidentally, to SECSTATE that military assistance is a key factor in the NIXON Doctrine and the total force concept. He said "the jig is up" if control of military aid goes to the Foreign Relations Committee. (This was said primarily for the benefit of SECSTATE).
9. The Vice President cautioned that we should watch for efforts on the part of the NVN to increase US casualties. This will start the demonstrations (I have passed this on to CINCPAC).
10. The President stated that the NVN have restraints and they know it and "they damn well better not forget."
11. The President then summarized. He said he is happy to see that everyone is on the same track. We must stay clear, at this point, of speculating as to the nature and extent of withdrawals. The announcement will be made in the middle of November, since we do not now know the circumstances that will exist, we cannot be specific.

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He said we must maintain discipline in our own group and not speculate. If asked what happens if THIEU is killed we should not reply but, rather, say that we don't expect this to happen. We must realize that the murder of DIEM, in which the US was involved, set off a train of coups which gave greater encouragement to the NVN. The "coup" road is unstable. Continuing the war is destabilizing and it is also very hard to have an election during a war -- very few countries tried it.

12. The US is supporting THIEU. Do not discuss "what if something happens". We could "bug out" and make political capital on the short term, but it would be a disaster worldwide. Countries of the world would become suspicious -- they would say you have deserted DIEM, THIEU, and who is next?

13. The President said we are at a position where we are committed and the failure or success of our policy depends on continuing our present trend towards our goals. The SVN are reaching a point where they can defend themselves. Look at NVN where Communism took over and killed half a million men -- imagine what would happen in SVN. The President went on to say that we have some good things going for us, such as the Chinese initiative. As he sees it, from a long-range not a short-range view, the question is: shall we talk now and have some kind of stabilization or shall we fight later -- 10 or 15 years from now?

↓
not talk +

T. H. MOORER

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