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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~SECRET~~/SENSITIVE (XGDS)

MEETING OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

Thursday, April 24, 1975

4:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. (30 minutes)

The Cabinet Room

From: Henry A. Kissinger *HK*

I. PURPOSE

To discuss the evacuation of Americans from South Vietnam and insure understanding and support of our evacuation strategy.

II. BACKGROUND, PARTICIPANTS & PRESS ARRANGEMENTS

A. Background: In light of the deteriorating situation around Saigon and of the imminent danger of North Vietnamese attacks on the city and on its principal airport, there has been strong pressure from a number of quarters to evacuate Americans as rapidly as possible without regard to other considerations.

The evacuation of Americans has been proceeding at a measured pace. About 1,600 Americans remained as of Wednesday morning, Washington time. Ambassador Martin says that he expects to have the total of the American community down to 1,090 as of Friday night.

With respect to the Vietnamese, we have been evacuating principally those Vietnamese who are relatives of American citizens and whose evacuation is necessary to persuade those American citizens to leave Vietnam. We have now started to pull out Vietnamese who have a particularly high risk of assassination or torture by the Communists, as we are pledged to do, but we have not yet begun a large-scale effort.

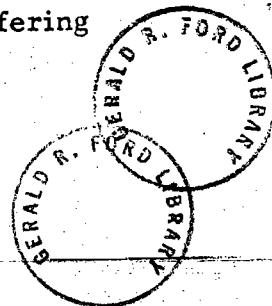
The House-Senate Conference Committee, meeting this afternoon, is to reconcile the differences between their differing

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versions of a humanitarian assistance and evacuation bill. Both bills provide authority for evacuation of Vietnamese, but not for the use of American forces to support that evacuation beyond their support for the evacuation of Americans.

B. Participants: (List at Tab A)

C. Press Arrangements: The meeting, but not the subject, will be announced. There will be a White House photographer.

The House-Senate Conference Committee is authorized to conduct such activities as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act.

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III. TALKING POINTS

- I have asked you here to review where we are regarding evacuation and to explain my thinking as to what it is we are trying to accomplish. It is absolutely essential at this critical time that we all understand each other and that we all work together toward a common goal.
- It has been my objective to reduce the American community and its dependents, and high-risk Vietnamese, at a rapid rate. At the same time, I considered it essential that this rate not be so fast as to run the risk of inducing panic.
- This has been a difficult balancing operation between these two competing goals. It is also essential that we do whatever we can to depart with dignity and salvage whatever is possible from the Vietnam tragedy. To that end, as most of you know, we have undertaken soundings with a view toward a ceasefire and political discussions.
- I do not know whether we will be successful. We have few bargaining chips. It is important, however, to utilize those we do have. One of those is the maintenance of a calm and self-assured posture as we reduce our Embassy to the minimum essential strength. If we project the impression of pell-mell evacuation, we certainly reduce any incentive for discussion.
- We are also doing what we can to insure a degree of stability in the Saigon Government. If the DRV thinks it can unravel the government until it gets one of the complexion it wants without any action on its part, its incentive to talk is minimal.
- It is for all these reasons that I have tried to project an image of steadiness in our draw-down and in the other moves we have made. I have today ordered Graham Martin to reduce Americans to 1090 by Friday evening Saigon time. I have in addition ordered that by Saturday evening Saigon time all but the very essential personnel in the U.S. contractor and unofficial American category be eliminated. That should put us at a level where we can evacuate quickly on a moment's notice.

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-- I do not want to complete the evacuation before it is necessary because it would destroy the last chance there may be for the South Vietnamese to put something together that can keep them free at least for a time, and keep Saigon from being overrun. I will not, however, risk a single American life by delaying an evacuation on that account. I intend to order final evacuation before I think Americans are in actual danger. In the meantime I expect your total support in implementing the strategy which I have outlined.

[-- You may wish to make a few comments on the Middle East and our posture during the reassessment. If so, I believe you know best what you would wish to say.]

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD:

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

PARTICIPANTS:

- President Ford
- Vice President Rockefeller
- Secretary of State Kissinger
- Secretary of Defense Schlesinger
- Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff,
General George S. Brown
- Director of Central Intelligence,
William Colby
- Deputy Secretary of State,
Robert Ingersoll
- Deputy Secretary of Defense,
William Clements
- Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft,
Deputy Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs

DATE AND TIME:

Thursday, April 24, 1975
4:35 p. m.

PLACE:

The Cabinet Room
The White House

SUBJECT:

Vietnam Evacuation

President: As you know, before we got into the Phnom Penh evacuation, we had a meeting. I wanted to know what our plans were. It took place at the right time and in the best of circumstances.

I have kept in daily contact with Henry and Brent on where things stood in Vietnam. I know the Congress has been on us on this, to get it off their

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MR 92-11F-20 - NSC HR 5/19/93
By lt NARA Date 10/22/93



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back. I think it is very important to stay there as long as we can contribute, to evacuate in a way that will not promote panic, and to contribute as much as possible to a peaceful solution.

Now, I understand we are down from 6000 to about 1600.

Schlesinger: It has gone up to 1700.

President: I have ordered a reduction by Friday night of to 1090.

Schlesinger: That is a lot in one day.

President: That is what I ordered. There will be another order that by Sunday non-essential non-governmental personnel must be out of there. The group that is left will stay until the order is issued to take them all out.

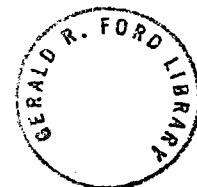
We just got a reply from the Soviets to a request we made. Henry, give us the background and the message.

Kissinger: At the President's request, I contacted Dobrynin Saturday to request their assistance to permit a safe evacuation and the beginning of political discussions and asked them to help create the conditions where this would be possible. [See U.S. oral note at Tab A]. We also told him specifically on Monday that we would take a serious view of an attack on Tan Son Nhut. We have received the following reply.

[He reads from the Soviet message at Tab B.]

This means, in effect, that if we keep the dialogues going we have an assurance against military action as we pull our people out. On the political side, the tripartite arrangement gives us the hope of a coalition solution which can be better than surrender. We will go back to the Soviets to find out what they mean by implementation of the Paris Accords and to say we will cooperate. We will say we won't take precipitate action and we assume they won't.

President: My interpretation is that the lull which we have is a result of this. You could assume they weren't yet ready and would move when they are ready. This looks like they are willing for an agreement within the framework of the Paris Accords and that we can keep our people there, and reduce them until such time as we decide to remove them.



We have been through a difficult time. It was a risk and a gamble but it was my responsibility and I didn't want to do anything to risk the situation. I think I was right, and I will continue to act that way.

Every one should be guided by the 1090 and the further removal of non-essential, non-governmental people. These are Americans, not Vietnamese dependents, who I assume are adding to the list everyday, in a ratio of about four to one.

Brown: About 15 to 1 in the last few days.

Kissinger: You asked the Soviets about American and South Vietnamese evacuation and they only answered about American citizens.

Vice President: How do you read that?

Kissinger: I read that as they are tactically saying "Get them out" but they can't give us approval.

President: I take it to mean we can't use force.

Schlesinger: We are delighted with such restraint.

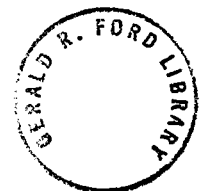
President: But I want to do whatever is needed to secure the American evacuation. George, would you review the plan for us??

Brown: The first stage we are in now. In the second stage we would send two companies in just to keep order. If we lost the airfield we would go to helos. We have two landing zones -- one at old MACV compound and one at the Embassy. We can put about six helos down at once. We would put 1100 Marines in with the first wave. The helos would come in and evacuate the 1100 people in an hour and 15 minutes. Then they would go back for the Marines.

President: Then the total is about 2 1/2 hours.

Kissinger: Graham [Martin] said he had a deal with the airborne commander and he would keep order.

President: How about the typhoon?



Kissinger: There is no danger now.

President: I think these orders to Martin will get us within the 1100 required.

Clements: How many Vietnamese are we talking about?

Kissinger: We don't know.

Colby: I think we should move as soon as possible for the high-risk people.

Kissinger: We told him yesterday and today to get moving on the high-risk people.

Brown: I think we should keep mixing the loads -- Americans and Vietnamese -- so we don't get criticized for leaving American personnel there as hostages.

Schlesinger: Henry's message is a source of reassurance, but there are some sources of concern. Their control might be limited; there are reports of sappers going in; and reports of attempts to stir up unrest; and there are some risks of attempts to go after Americans. In light of Henry's message, that appears manageable. A more difficult problem is population control, especially in conditions where they might have to fire on Vietnamese. You know we have favored going down to minimum levels. We should consider what we do if Americans are held hostage. We could say no ships will go into Hanoi until the hostages are released. So we should reduce as low as possible.

Colby: We have some people who are prisoners now.

Schlesinger: Just missionaries.

Colby: No. Also some advisors.

President: I understand the risk. It is mine and I am doing it. But let's make sure we carry out the orders.

Vice President: You can't insure the interests of America without risks.

President: With God's help.

Vice President: It takes real courage to do what is right in these conditions.



ORAL NOTE

The President wishes the following brought to the urgent attention of General Secretary Brezhnev.

For the past three years Soviet-American relations have proceeded from the Basic Principles of May 1972, and above all from the principle of restraint. The situation in Viet-Nam has now reached a point, that the United States and the USSR must consider the long term consequences ~~of further developments there for Soviet-American relations and~~ for the international situation as a whole. There is little to be gained from a debate over the origins of the present situation or over which parties must be held responsible.

Under present circumstances our overriding concern is to achieve controlled conditions, which will save lives and permit the continued evacuation of American citizens and those South Vietnamese to whom we have a direct and special obligation. This can only be achieved through a temporary cease fire.

We urgently request that the Government of the USSR use its good offices to achieve a temporary halt to the fighting. In this connection, we are prepared to discuss the special political circumstances that could make this possible. We request the most expeditious answer.



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Talking Points

-- We are not going to the Chinese or any other intermediary; nor are we willing to approach the DRV.

-- We are going to Moscow because it is in our long term mutual interest that the situation be brought to its conclusion in a manner that does not jeopardize Soviet-American relations, or affect the attitude of the American people toward other international problems.

-- If there is a temporary cease fire, we would be prepared to convene the Paris Conference immediately, or we can consider alternatives that the Soviet Union might work out with Hanoi.

-- During the period of a temporary cease fire we would be willing to halt military supplies.

-- But we are concerned that there will be attacks on the airfields, that will make it impossible to continue an orderly reduction in American citizens.

-- Moreover, we have detected Soviet surface-to-air missiles within 50 miles of Saigon; any attack on passenger aircraft would create a most dangerous situation.

-- In light of the developing military situation, we need to know now whether there is a chance for a temporary halt in the fighting that might permit a political process to start.

[-- The Soviets' answer will have a significant bearing on our relations.]

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*Delivered to The Secretary at State Dept.
4⁰⁰ p.m., April 24, 1975*

As it has already been said to the President immediately after the message of the President of April 19 was received by L. E. Brezhnev we took appropriate steps to get in touch with the Vietnamese side in this connection.

As the result of those contacts now we can inform the President about the following: the position of the Vietnamese side on the question of evacuation of American citizens from South Vietnam is definitely positive. The Vietnamese ^{have} stated that they have no intention to put any obstacles in the course of military actions to evacuation of American citizens from South Vietnam and that now in fact favorable conditions have been established for such an evacuation.

At the same time it was emphasized that in the struggle for achieving a political settlement the Vietnamese side will proceed from the Paris Agreement. We were also told that the Vietnamese do not intend to damage the prestige of the United States.

Informing the President of the above in a confidential manner L. E. Brezhnev expresses his hope that the President will duly appreciate such a position of the Vietnamese side and will not allow any actions on the United States part which would be fraught with a new exacerbation of the situation in Indochina.

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