

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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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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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.

