

MEMORANDUM

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By cbm, NARA, Date 7-10-02

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Cy: Bromley Smith

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September 26, 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: NSC Meeting - September 25, 1968, The United Nations and Troop Ceilings

The United Nations

After the President opened the meeting by seeking Secretary Rusk's view of the up-coming UN session, Rusk deferred to Ambassador Ball. Ball predicted a routine UN session. Czechoslovakia was the overriding issue, but most delegates would be reluctant to support a specific resolution, fearing damage to the already precarious Czech position. Secretary Rusk suggested that the Soviet proposal on peaceful relations among nations might provide a vehicle for the Czech issue.

As a second major problem Ambassador Ball cited the Middle East, saying that although the Arab position "looked good" (since they had presented concrete proposals while the Israelis were dealing in generalities), the chances for a settlement were not promising. He suggested that Soviet and US pressures might prove useful; however, he feared that if nothing developed by November 22 (one year after the UN resolution) then Ambassador Jarring was likely to quit and return to his Moscow post as the Swedish Ambassador, leaving the Middle East problem to an unpromising future in the hands of the Security Council. He noted that because both Presidential candidates were making them generous promises, the Israelis were in no hurry to solve the problem.

Ambassador Ball then labelled Biafra "heart-breaking situation" and noted the great willingness of the combatants to sacrifice lives. Another obstacle was the OAU view that the Nigerian war was an African problem (despite the fact that the assiduous efforts of Haile Selassie and others had gotten nowhere towards solving it). Because of the OAU view, the UN would do nothing; the African states supported by the rest of the Third World would block effective action. Ball tentatively proposed (saying he had not yet discussed his ideas with Secretary Rusk), that the President appoint someone in the U.S. government to hold U.S. responsibility for the humanitarian aspects of the Nigerian problem -- a move designed to exhibit our concern by offering a focal point for our support of ICRC-like activities. He said he had some names in mind for such a position.

Secretary Rusk noted that it was unlikely that any major UN votes would emerge from committees before the U.S. November election. Rusk queried Ball on Thant's initiative on a halt of the US bombing in North Vietnam. Ball was philosophical about the statement, and believed the reaction had already had

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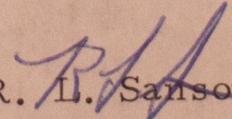
some educational value for Thant. He noted that, under pressure from some delegates, Thant had backed off some distance from his original position. (Later, Ball suggested that U Thant had a tendency to be a compulsive talker when placed before a microphone.) Rusk added that several delegates used the word "incomprehensible" to describe Thant's settlement and that even the New York Times condemned his tactics.

Sisco then mentioned the visit of eighty Foreign Ministers to the U.S., many wanting to see the President and most wanting to know about progress in the Paris talks. Rusk anticipated a "plague" of Foreign Ministers. The President asked if Congress had been briefed on upcoming UN activities. Rusk replied that they had not, but that he would offer a briefing.

Troop Ceilings

The President then spoke about Representative Laird's statement on expected US troop withdrawals from South Vietnam. He expressed regret that such a foundationless statement could emerge and wondered what the enemy must think if those like Laird thought they found evidence to support such speculation. He noted he had contacted Secretary Clifford early that morning on the first news of the Laird statement. Clifford had been asked to determine if Laird was possibly misled by an ambiguous Pentagon position. Secretary Clifford had sent over some unreleased testimony he gave on September 10 and the President asked him to read from it. This was done and Clifford's position was clearly one of no anticipated troop withdrawals and a refusal to speculate on the likelihood of such withdrawals. Clifford said he would release his testimony in the afternoon with an addendum making clear that not only were no troop withdrawals planned, but that the authorized troop build-up to the 549,000 level was still in progress.

General Wheeler commented on the possibility that Laird's statement was sourced in press reports from Saigon on General Abrams' program to diminish the proportion of troops deployed in logistic or administrative roles. He noted that, in his telephone conversation with Abrams earlier in the day, Abrams had said no troop withdrawal reports were issued by MACV and noted that by no accounting would the 90 - 100,000 range (suggested by Laird) be approached in the "shake out" reallocation.


R. L. Sansom