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January 24, 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: NSC Meeting Held January 24, 1968, at 1:00 p.m. in
the Cabinet Room

PARTICIPANTS: The President
The Vice President
Secretary of State, Dean Rusk
Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara
Secretary of Treasury, Henry H. Fowler
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler
Director, Central Intelligence Agency, Richard Helms
Director, U.S. Information Agency, Leonard Marks
Deputy Secretary of Defense, Cyrus R. Vance
Under Secretary of State, Nicholas Katzenbach
Under Secretary of Defense, Paul Nitze
Assistant Secretary of State, Joseph Sisco
Assistant Secretary of State, Lucius D. Battle
President's Special Assistant for National Security
Affairs, Mr. Walt Rostow
Executive Secretary, Mr. Bromley Smith
White House Press Officer, George Christian
White House Press Officer, Tom Johnson
Nathaniel Davis
Harold H. Saunders

I. The President noted that the meeting had been called to discuss the Cyprus problem but thought the Council would benefit from a late briefing on the status of the USS Pueblo which had been captured by the North Koreans. Secretary McNamara said he had little in the way of facts to add to what has been in the press except for one point-- that the incident appeared to have been pre-planned. In addition to this, two other facts made this a particularly serious incident: (1) the Soviets appear to have known of Korean plans in advance; (2) the Koreans seem to have no intention of returning either the ship or the men soon.

The Secretary promised the President a fuller reading by the end of the day on what North Korean motives might have been, what they were likely to do now, and how we should respond.

The President asked whether the Captain of the ship had ever asked for help. Secretary McNamara and General Wheeler described the chronology of the ship's capture in detail (and agreed with Mr. Rostow

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to develop a common set of facts). In answer to the President's question, they said that the Captain had radioed an SOS.

In response to further questioning by the President, Secretary McNamara explained that the Commander of the Fifth Air Force had decided not to send planes to the ship's rescue because (1) he hesitated to commit a small US force against a larger Korean force in an area where Korean air defense is especially tight and (2) that force might have arrived in darkness.

Secretary Rusk noted that the negative reaction of the Soviets and North Koreans was not unexpected. He agreed with Secretary McNamara that apparent Soviet foreknowledge made this a most serious incident. He opined that the motive behind the capture was to pressure us further on Vietnam with the threat of a possible second front.

The President asked about Congressional briefing and reaction. General Wheeler promised a detailed report of his staff's efforts to inform the Congress. Secretary Rusk reported on his appearance before the House Foreign Affairs Committee this morning. He noted that they were outraged, viewed the incident as serious, but had no specific course of action to propose.

Mr. Marks noted that North Korean broadcasts, while covering the facts of the incident fairly straightforwardly, had made a major effort to generate fear in South Korea using the incident as a point of departure.

Mr. Helms summarized by suggesting that the North Koreans had seized a target of opportunity to distract our attention from Vietnam. The President interjected that perhaps they hoped to detain our carrier (the Enterprise) in northern waters for a few extra days.

The President was handed a transcript of the North Korean broadcast of a "confession" by the Captain of the ship. He asked Secretary McNamara to check the authenticity of the purported broadcast by the Captain. In response to the President's question, Mr. Rostow suggested that the statement appeared to have been written by a Communist rather than by an American and that, judging from the "confession's" mention of the USSR as the ship's intelligence target, the Soviets might have helped draft it. Mr. Katzenbach suggested that the North Koreans might have deliberately drafted the "confession" so as to involve the USSR.

The President asked for further opinions on Soviet complicity. Secretary McNamara cited the fact that Ambassador Thompson was in Kuznetsov's office within 9-1/2 hours of the incident and the Soviets had already established a position.

In response to the President's question, Secretary McNamara said the ship had radioed that it was destroying its classified equipment. All had not been destroyed, and the Secretary said we were evaluating the problem. He did say, answering the President, that he felt the overall political problem was far more serious than the intelligence compromise might be.

Mr. Helms summarized further, agreeing with what had been said. While he regarded the incident as serious, he pointed out that in the context of the cold war, it was a nitpick. He cited as evidence of collusion between the USSR and North Korea the importance which Moscow attaches to North Korea in its competition with Communist China. On request, he cited two intelligence reports which indicated the policy of North Korea to help North Vietnam by diverting us and the South Koreans from giving full attention to the war in Vietnam. He noted that North Korean pilots and 10 MIG 21s had been sent to Vietnam without Soviet knowledge, and a general policy of increasing pressure on South Korea to discourage it from sending additional forces to Vietnam.

The President concluded this portion of the discussion by urging the Secretaries to make sure Members of Congress were properly informed in order to head off unhelpful statements based on misinformation. In response to the President's query, Secretary Rusk said that his briefing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee that morning had covered four subjects: the ship, the crash of the B-52 bomber off Greenland, the NPT, and Vietnam. He concluded that the meeting was "definitely a plus."

II. The President, in introducing a discussion of the Cyprus problem, welcomed Mr. Vance to the Council table and said he wanted to thank him publicly for his efforts last November and December in avoiding a war between Greece and Turkey. He then asked Mr. Battle to summarize the problem for the Council.

Mr. Battle said that, while Mr. Vance's mission had saved us from war, the Cyprus problem remains. New small incidents occur weekly which heighten tension on the island. Next time it will be impossible to hold Turkey back, especially while the Greek internal situation is what

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it is. Ambassador Yost had reviewed the situation after Mr. Vance's return. He concluded--and the IRG and SIG have concurred--that the situation is unstable and that it is important that we be ready to move in if required. Via the Vance mission, we have involved ourselves again in the Cypriot problem. The UN is now discussing how to tackle the long range problem and we must let the UN effort run its course, but we are not optimistic about what U Thant can achieve and should not let him fail without having something of our own ready to put in his place. Mr. Battle concluded by saying that he did not want to step into this problem, but he felt we had no choice but to be ready.

Mr. Helms noted that the Greeks have withdrawn their troops as agreed with Mr. Vance, although there are still some 1500 on the island as a regular part of the National Guard. He noted that the Greeks claim that 300 Turk officers remain in a similar capacity. There is still no inter-communal cooperation. Makarios' declaration of a Presidential election at the end of February might further inflame the situation. In sum, the situation is still extremely uneasy.

In response to the President's request, Mr. Vance summarized his feelings as follows: "The situation is still held together with paste and glue, and more paste than glue." If it flares up again, war can not be avoided. The majority of Turks had wanted to go to war in November. The Greek people felt humiliated and many of them are anxious for a chance to have a go at the Turks. The Cypriots are fatalistic.

He believed that the US should take an active role in trying to achieve a settlement. The pace of the problem is quicker than the pace of the UN Secretary General. He hopes the problem can be solved within the framework of the UN, but he is "not sanguine."

Mr. Sisco agreed that the UN would not be able to do the job. He noted one slight opening in the last 24 hours--that Makarios has apparently agreed to discuss his own draft Constitution with the Turkish Cypriots. He shared the prediction that U Thant would be at the end of his road in a few days. The President asked whether there is more that Ambassador Goldberg could do. Mr. Sisco said the Ambassador had made clear his support of the Secretary General and had urged Cypriots and Turks to get together. He pointed out, however, that the Turks distrust U Thant. The Cypriot Foreign Minister wants to tie the pacification efforts envisioned in the Vance agreement to replace the

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withdrawn Greek troops with Cyprus' protection against Turkish invasion. The Turks want to concentrate on pacification alone.

Mr. Sisco pointed out that the governments contributing troops to the UN peacekeeping force are restive and may be reluctant to renew their contributions when the current mandate for the force expires at the end of March unless there is some progress in further implementing the Vance agreement and moving toward a more permanent arrangement.

Secretary Rusk noted that it is time for serious talks with the Turks and Cypriots. He hoped we could move some diplomatic chips in before the next crisis--before we "get to the end of the road."

Under Secretary Katzenbach agreed that the time fuse is shorter than the UN process. He noted that we are concerting with the Secretary General in order to avoid being blamed for his failure.

In response to the President's request to summarize, Mr. Battle said that we would be in touch with the Secretary General and the parties concerned over the next few days. However, we would like to get our mediator appointed and briefed quietly in order to have him ready to step in the moment he was needed.

III. Turning to Vietnam, the President summarized for Secretary McNamara and Secretary Katzenbach a talk with Senator Edward Kennedy. The Senator had come back from Vietnam feeling that (a) corruption is increasing in the South Vietnamese government and (b) there is some feeling among our generals that we are doing unnecessary things. He asked Secretary McNamara to talk with Senator Kennedy and try to find out exactly what is bothering him.

The President asked General Wheeler whether he remained confident that General Westmoreland has everything he needs to handle the impending attack on Khesanh. General Wheeler said he was; he had cabled General Westmoreland to be sure he had everything he needed and received an affirmative reply.

The President noted that the trend and color of stories from Vietnam recently seemed better to him. He suggested that Secretary McNamara make this observation to the field as encouragement.

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IV. In conclusion, the President asked Secretary Fowler to describe his progress in testimony before the Congress on the Administration proposal for a surtax. Secretary Fowler read the summary statement he had made at the end of his testimony. He concluded by saying there is little question now in anyone's mind whether the tax increase is necessary. The President appeared impressed by the Secretary's summary and asked him to pass it to CEA Chairman Gardner Ackley so parts of it could be incorporated in the President's economic message to the Congress.

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