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~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~  
FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

SUMMARY NOTES OF 591<sup>st</sup> NSC MEETING  
September 25, 1968; 12:05 to 1:40 P. M.

The 23rd UN General Assembly

The President: The purpose of the meeting of the Council is to review the issues before the current United Nations General Assembly and to discuss our position on these questions. Secretary Rusk will comment in general on the General Assembly meeting and Ambassador Ball will deal with the specific problems.

Secretary Rusk: Suggested that Ambassador Ball lead off and he would comment later.

Ambassador Ball: The session of the General Assembly meeting in New York will probably be the most routine in UN history, barring some unforeseen event. (See copy of State Summary of UNGA issues attached.)

The following major issues will be raised:

1. Czechoslovakian Situation

- a. A specific General Assembly agenda item on Czechoslovakia is unlikely, especially if the Czech delegation takes the position that it does not want a separate item.
- b. There is very little support from NATO members for a specific Czech item.
- c. The Czech situation will be fully debated under other agenda items which will make it easier to avoid Soviet rebuttal by citing Vietnam and other world problems.
- d. If there is further Soviet repression in Czechoslovakia, the situation in the UN could change drastically.

2. The Middle East

- a. We have the last clear chance for an Arab-Israeli settlement in the next few months.

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(Ambassador Jarring, continued)

- b. Ambassador Jarring will be in New York and will be meeting with Arab foreign ministers and the Israeli foreign minister. The work on the Middle East will be done in hotel rooms, not in the United Nations Assembly.
- c. Currently, the Arabs appear to the public to be readier to settle than the Israelis.
- d. There is very small chance for settlement unless we push on the Israelis and the Russians push on the Arabs. Even if this were done, a settlement is doubtful because the two sides are so far apart. This is a sad prognosis.
- e. Unless action comes within the next few weeks, Jarring will be ending a year of activity without results. If he cannot advance toward accomplishing the objectives of the November 22 resolution, he may quit. The problem then becomes even more difficult for us because it will be returned to the UN Security Council. The subject is complicated by the U.S. election.

3. Biafra

- a. The sad situation in Biafra is a result of federal Nigerian leaders who are willing to sacrifice millions of lives to gain a military advantage. Efforts of the Ethiopian Emperor to bring the two sides to an agreement have been unsuccessful. The result is a human tragedy in which thousands are starving.
- b. It is difficult to get the Biafra problem into the United Nations because the African members say the OAU should handle the case. Asian members side with the Africans in opposition to UN intervention. Despite world pressure, the General Assembly cannot act because of this African opposition.
- c. To handle the humanitarian aspects of this problem, we should name a man to coordinate U.S. Government assistance to the Biafrans.

4. Chinese Representation

There is no change in the U.S. position of opposition to the admission of Communist China. The voting pattern of past General Assemblies is likely to be repeated. There is therefore no serious problem this year.



Secretary Rusk: The general debate of the Assembly is beginning later this year than usual. The debate will occupy the Assembly during most of October. Consequently, GA votes on major issues are unlikely before our election is over.

Ambassador Ball: Secretary General U Thant's press statement on halting the bombing in Vietnam upset many UN delegates. There is no serious effort to introduce a Vietnam resolution as a result of the Secretary General's intervention. U Thant may have learned a lesson from this incident. He was rebuked by us for his action and in a later statement has "walked the cat back" from the position many people thought he was advocating, i. e., a United Nations resolution calling for a bombing halt in North Vietnam.

Assistant Secretary Sisco: U Thant's statement on Vietnam will not change the direction of the General Assembly. However, some 80 foreign ministers who will be in New York will all be asking Secretary Rusk whether progress is being made in the Paris talks with the North Vietnamese.

The President: The U Thant statement was certainly not helpful. It added further confusion. Even the enemy must be confused by the various statements, including that of Representative Laird (reported plan to reduce by 90,000 the number of U. S. troops in Vietnam).

Handing a copy of Secretary Clifford's recent Congressional testimony to the Secretary, he asked that the pertinent positions be read to the Council.

Secretary Clifford: During a Congressional Hearing, Representative Lipscomb asked what was the basis of reports that the number of U. S. troops in Vietnam would be decreased this year or next. The quotation makes clear that we have no plan to reduce the number of U. S. troops in Vietnam. We do not plan to reduce the number barring some unforeseen development. No prediction can be made that troops will return in 1969. A Defense Department statement is being released to the press which will quote the testimony given on September 10 and restate that today's position is the same. There is no plan to drop below the authorized level of 549,000 men, in fact, we are sending troops to Vietnam to bring it up to the authorized level. (A copy of the draft statement is attached.) (Tab A)

General Wheeler: In Vietnam, General Abrams' staff is re-examining the composition of our forces. He may recommend that some units now there be



(General Wheeler, continued)

replaced with other units for which he has higher priority. In a conversation this morning General Abrams said this turnover would involve nowhere near 90,000 men, the figure cited by Representative Laird.

Secretary Clifford: Our plan is to reply firmly to Rep. Laird first, if he comes back and tries to say that the present consideration of a reshuffle of troops is confirmation of his earlier statement, we should let Abrams explain to the press that his present examination of forces has nothing whatsoever to do with any plan to reduce the U.S. troop level by 90,000 men.

The President: Asked Secretary Rusk to report on the talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris.

Secretary Rusk: The prospect in Paris is that we will not reach an early settlement. Today's meeting with the North Vietnamese makes clear that they will not talk seriously until we halt the bombing.

The President: What do they mean when they say we must not only halt the bombing but all other acts of war?

Several members contributed to the reply that the North Vietnamese are referring to naval bombardment above the DMZ and aerial reconnaissance of North Vietnam. Both Secretary Rusk and Secretary Clifford said that we must insist on the continuation of aerial reconnaissance even after a bombing halt. This involves high-level flights as well as the use of drones. Both Secretaries indicated that the North Vietnamese know that we will insist on aerial reconnaissance.

The President asked if General Taylor's comments on the negotiations had been seen by Secretary Rusk. Mr. Rostow gave the President a copy of the paper which was handed to Secretary Rusk.

The President asked Secretary Rusk and Ambassador Ball to send to him recommendations on specific UN problems which needed to be acted upon.

Secretary Rusk: Asked to report on his conversation with the Spanish Foreign Minister this morning. No progress has been made on negotiating the renewal of our base agreement with the Spanish. Madrid is asking \$500-600 million in military equipment as a price for renewal. The gap between what we are prepared to offer,



(Secretary Rusk, continued)

about \$100 million over five years, is very wide. They want equipment for an army but no one knows whom they would fight.

The Spanish apparently have concluded that they will invoke Article 5 of the existing agreement which starts in motion our withdrawal from the bases. They have been asked to extend the existing agreement for six months during which time we might be able to reach some solution. The initial reaction of the Spanish to this proposal was negative but the Spanish Government has not yet turned it down. We must face the prospect of closing our bases in Spain if no solution can be found.

The President: Asked whether the appropriate Congressional Committees had been briefed on UN problems. Secretary Rusk said he or Assistant Secretary Sisco would brief the proper Congressmen. Ambassador Ball pointed out that there are two Senators on the U.S. delegation who will be in New York this week and will remain for a few days of the General Assembly.

Secretary Rusk: Mentioned to the President that many of the Foreign Ministers coming to New York would want to come down to Washington. He said he would speak to the President later about those Foreign Ministers whom the President should see.

Secretary Fowler: Said that he wished to add to the list of those wanting to come to Washington who wanted to see the President, 110 Finance Ministers and over 100 representatives of central banks.

The President: Asked Secretary Rusk to summarize the instructions under which the negotiators in Paris were operating. There might be some lack of understanding and it would be good to spell out to the Council members exactly what our negotiators were trying to do.

Secretary Rusk: Cautioned the members to insure the secrecy of his remarks, made the following points.

1. We are in Paris on the basis of the proposal the President made on March 31. The North Vietnamese are in Paris on the basis of their April 3 reply. Hence, there is no agreed agenda for the Paris talks. In large part, we have been talking past each other.



(Secretary Rusk, continued)

2. Our objective is peace in Southeast Asia, not a bombing halt. Therefore, we have asked continuously what would happen if we stopped the bombing.
3. We have suggested several ways in which the North Vietnamese could reply--restoration of the Demilitarized Zone, no attacks on cities, participation of the Government of South Vietnam in the negotiations, etc. We have told them that the National Liberation Front representatives may sit on the Hanoi side of the table but the North Vietnamese have refused to say that we can bring representatives of the Government of South Vietnam with us.
4. The North Vietnamese have come back with no counter proposals. They repeat merely that after we stop the bombing, they will discuss issues which either side wishes to raise. They refuse to agree to take any action which implies reciprocity for our present limitation on the bombing of North Vietnam.
5. There are three basic points--restoration of the DMZ, no attacks on cities, and no talks without the legal Government of South Vietnam. We have pointed out that they must accept as a fact of life that we cannot stop the bombing without knowing that they accept the three basic points. We have made clear that we would not be able to continue negotiations if the North Vietnamese attack in the DMZ, attack cities in South Vietnam, or refuse to accept on our side representatives of the South Vietnamese Government.
6. Hanoi has refused to say anything more than that the atmosphere will improve if we stop the bombing. No one can say what they would actively do.
7. If the actions of the North Vietnamese were such as to endanger our position in a bombing halt, we would have to resume bombing. We would pay a very high political cost if we resumed the bombing. Hanoi is trying to put us in the position where we would either have to pay this cost or accept their taking advantage of the bombing halt.
8. In today's meeting, the North Vietnamese stated categorically that they would not say, in advance of a bombing halt, whether the Saigon government could participate in the negotiations involving the future of South Vietnam.
9. There is no reason why we cannot insist that the North Vietnamese be specific as to what they will do. In the negotiations involving Soviet missiles in Cuba, the Korean Armistice negotiations, and even in the Berlin crisis,



(Secretary Rusk, continued)

we were dealing with specific positions. The North Vietnamese are men. There is a man-from-Mars aspect about the North Vietnamese. There is no reason why we have to approach them as if they were different, and no reason why we cannot insist that they state specifically what they are prepared to do.

10. As to the prospects of the Paris talks, it is possible that something more will develop there. It is well to recall that the North Vietnamese held out for a month for Warsaw as the site of the talks before they finally accepted Paris.

11. Both sides are now at a watershed--at a critical point:

- a. Hanoi may consider that our terms are such as to have an unravelling effect on their war effort, i. e., morale of troops, Viet Cong guerillas, etc.
- b. Our side, Saigon, as well as our other allies could unravel if we halt the bombing for nothing, i. e., Hanoi might say we were caving in and therefore take a harder position on items other than the bombing, our allies would be dismayed, and the Saigon government might feel we were selling them out.

General Wheeler: There would be an adverse effect on the morale of our troops, on our allies and their troops, and on the Saigon government and their troops if we were to halt the bombing for nothing in return. General Abrams agrees with this statement.

The President: Asked why U Thant made his press statement and what could we expect from it.

Ambassador Ball: U Thant is Burmese and when he is in a press conference, he is impelled to talk at length. Even Under Secretary General Bunche acknowledged that U Thant's press conference remarks on the bombing halt were foolish. U Thant's Vietnam press conference statement will have relatively little effect on UN members who are more relaxed now that talks are going on in Paris. Their comments on Vietnam will be limited because they do not desire to say anything which might hinder the progress of the peace talks.



The President: Asked Secretary Clifford if he wished to comment.

Secretary Clifford: Of the three items mentioned by Secretary Rusk--DMZ, cities and GVN participation, the shelling of cities can be a condition not precedent, but subsequent. If serious talks begin, the shelling of South Vietnamese cities would be exceedingly serious. Therefore, the conditions can be reduced to two--the DMZ and GVN participation in the talks. The latter condition is absolute. If the North Vietnamese won't yield on this, we have no agreement.

On restoration of the DMZ, we should be prepared to proceed on the assumption that Hanoi won't attack in this area during the talks. This position is based on the San Antonio Formula, i. e., that we assume the North Vietnamese would not take advantage of a bombing halt. Hanoi turned this proposal down, but since then conditions have changed so much in the last year that the President could revive this offer. The risk of doing so would be minimal. The gain would be that substantive negotiations would be under way.

Adding up all our military assets, bombing can be said to amount to only 5 percent of 100 percent. If we halt the bombing, a very small part of our total military effort, we have perhaps a 65:35 chance of getting substantive talks resulting in a peace settlement. If Hanoi took advantage of the bombing halt, we could resume bombing.

A bombing halt would not affect morale of troops or governments. It might even go up if bombing is halted, talks proceed, and the level of combat consequently decreases. We would be trading 5 percent of our efforts for talks which would likely be successful.

Secretary Clifford: In response to the President's question, said his 5 percent figure was merely hypothetical.

Secretary Rusk: The political value of the bombing is much higher than has been stated. If we halt the bombing, Hanoi may judge that we caved in because they were adamant and because world and domestic opinion forced us to give in. Hanoi might conclude that having won on the first point, they would move on to the last point, i. e., refuse to allow South Vietnamese participation in the substantive negotiations.

The President: Thought the North Vietnamese might move on to rejecting our insistence upon aerial reconnaissance.



Ambassador Ball: Noting that the President had not heard his heresies for a long time, said he shared Secretary Clifford's view wholeheartedly. He said our present position reminded him of the positions in the Arab-Israeli dispute, i. e., both sides dug in. As there are risks in any kind of war, there are risks also in peace-making. The risks involved in trying to get substantive discussions going with the North Vietnamese are low.

The President: The North Vietnamese have rejected our San Antonio offer to reply on an assumption that they would not take advantage of the bombing halt.

Ambassador Ball: The North Vietnamese have to take this position of formal rejection but even though they do, we should act as if they understood our assumption of no advantage.

We have blown up the importance of bombing way beyond life-size--at least on the basis of information made available to me.

We are dealing with Orientals. They have operated on their Eastern standards for thousands of years. We must recognize the element of face in their position.

Secretary Rusk: What about the face of our allies and that of other nations in Asia?

Ambassador Ball: There is no loss of face for us or for our allies in proceeding to a bombing halt based on an assumption. We are providing the bulk of military force.

We are taking a doctrinal position on the war. We say very simply, it is aggression by the North Vietnamese. This is not a correct view. It is a Communist theory of the war.

The Russians are prepared to help end the Vietnam war but they cannot do so until the war is being fought only in South Vietnam. The Russians cannot help as long as a socialist state is being attacked.

Hanoi is under pressure to negotiate, but it cannot accept a quid pro quo. It is impossible for them to offer to sign a firm contract as to what they would do when the bombing halts.



(Ambassador Ball, continued)

We are needlessly continuing the war, resulting in the loss of lives.

It is not nearly as difficult to resume the bombing as some here have said.

We should ask for all three of our conditions but the North Vietnamese won't give us assurances on any of the three. We should test the good faith of the North Vietnamese by halting the bombing for, say, two weeks. The talks would begin the next day.

Secretary Rusk: If we turn up with South Vietnamese representatives and the North Vietnamese refuse to go on with the meeting on the second day, would we then resume the bombing?

Ambassador Ball: We have to take some risks for peace. We are now in a box which we must get out of. Hanoi wants peace. They are afraid of Mr. Nixon, consider him irresponsible, and think that he might use nuclear weapons were he elected.

Secretary Clifford: Have we considered ending the Paris talks if the North Vietnamese do not move from their position?

Ambassador Ball: To end the talks in Paris would be the worst possible mistake. Hanoi wants to end the war by negotiation. The Soviets can't help now because they are stopped by the attacks on North Vietnam. They do want to help.

Secretary Rusk: To stop the bombing with no conditions would result in many Democrats voting for Nixon.

The President: Mr. Nixon shouldn't enter into this question in any way. The North Vietnamese feel the same way about all of us. The North Vietnamese are not hell-bent on reaching agreement. Several times we have made assumptions, halted the bombing, and been disappointed. The earlier pauses didn't work. The assumption we made proved false because the North Vietnamese took advantage of the pauses and of the Tet stand-down. We are asked to proceed on the theory that they will not attack our defenses along the DMZ or the cities. They have given us no evidence. We must have some reason for assuming that they will not take advantage of the bombing halt. We cannot base such action on hope or prayer. We need a wink or a nod or something. A burned child dreads fire. Our gambles for peace have, in the past, dead-ended.



(The President, continued)

Is it prudent to halt the bombing if we then have to face an objection to Saigon's participation in the negotiations? To negotiate without the South Vietnamese would be the surest way to defeat ourselves in South Vietnam. Is it not possible to ask for an understanding? We have halted the bombing eight times without result.

Ambassador Ball: The situation has changed radically--both politically and militarily since we last halted the bombing. (The President agreed.)

The pause helped our worldwide position as well as our domestic position. The American people are confused and a bombing halt would clarify our policy.

The President: We are not going to halt the bombing until we get something from the North Vietnamese--participation of the South Vietnamese Government in the negotiations, no shelling of cities, and no action in the Demilitarized Zone. The decision has been made and we are not about to change it. Acceptance of a bombing halt without conditions is not in the offing.

General Wheeler: We have hard evidence that we have achieved a strong military position in Vietnam. The bombing is a much higher percentage of our total military effort than the five percent suggested.

Secretary Clifford: The five percent figure is an effort to describe the percentage of our total assets which bombing represents. If we add up all our military assets, Army, Navy, etc., the bombing of North Vietnam comprises only five percent of our total assets.

General Wheeler: Bombing of North Vietnam is the only pressure we have on North Vietnam.

Ambassador Ball: The pressure on Hanoi is represented by the fighting in South Vietnam where they are suffering very heavy losses and are hurting badly.

General Wheeler: General Giap is quoted as saying thousands are dying today and thousands will die tomorrow. The North Vietnamese will send more men into



(General Wheeler, continued)

South Vietnam no matter what their losses. If we stop bombing above the 17th parallel, Hanoi can move up forces and ammunition into the combat zone and, on short notice, hit us very hard.

It will be impossible for us to resume the bombing unless the North Vietnamese take some major action--something more than refusing to negotiate with the South Vietnamese Government. A halt will adversely affect the morale of our forces and the morale of the people of South Vietnam. The unilateral action on our part will be considered a victory for the enemy and encourage him. The U.S. people, according to a recent poll, are not anxious to halt the bombing. Some 65 percent are recorded as opposing a no-condition bombing halt.

It is wrong militarily to halt pressure on a weakening enemy. Politically, the action would also be wrong. All the Chiefs of Staff share this view.

Deputy Secretary Nitze: We have the alternatives of continuing our present course or adopting a new course.

We could halt the bombing, continue our aerial reconnaissance, and bring with us to the meeting in Paris representatives of South Vietnam on the first day of the negotiations. What will the North Vietnamese do? They might shoot down our reconnaissance planes, but I doubt it. They might refuse to come to the meeting, but I think the odds are 50:50 that they would come. If they don't appear for the meeting and refuse to do so for a week, we could easily resume the bombing. The problems associated with neutralizing the Demilitarized Zone could be worked out.

Director Marks: What would be the military cost for two weeks of following the Ball proposal?

General Wheeler: It is impossible to say exactly. General Abrams, on the scene, said that a bombing halt for two or three weeks would make possible a substantial build-up of North Vietnamese forces. They could move up artillery, etc., to the DMZ. In two weeks, they could build up sufficient forces to mount a large offensive. In addition, a two-week halt would increase U.S. and allied casualties.

Secretary Rusk: The real question is how would it be possible to hold Saigon together during the two-week period.



The President: General Abrams has told us that if there were a bombing halt, the enemy in ten days could increase his capability five times along the DMZ. If the North Vietnamese did this, General Abrams says he would be forced to move his troops back from the DMZ line.

Director Marks: The issue thus narrows down to how much risk is involved in a bombing halt.

The President: If we thought they would not take advantage of a bombing halt in a two-week period, we would jump at the proposal.

Secretary Clifford: The basic point involved is to get a test of Hanoi's intentions. They say if we stop the bombing, they will discuss all points which we wish to raise. If we halt the bombing, the Soviets would help along peace negotiations. General Wheeler's point is academic. The question we want answered is are these people ready to sit down to negotiate?

If the North Vietnamese start building up their forces the day after the bombing is halted and talks begin, we will then know they are not sincere. Then we will know that we have been turned down and will have a sound basis for resuming the bombing. From then on, we could go as far as we wished.

The President: We have repeatedly stood down the bombing, once for six days, and another time for 37 days. They will move as they did before. They will take advantage of our restraint. We won't be able to conclude the next day that their intentions are clear because they won't move a whole division or act in a way to make it appear that they are taking advantage. We will have no immediate evidence. The result will be that we will be here debating, as we have in the past, what their actions mean and whether they are, in fact, using the bombing halt to their military advantage.

Secretary Clifford: No plan is acceptable which does not include the requirement of the North Vietnamese to accept the participation of the South Vietnamese Government in the negotiations.

The President: Secretary Clifford recommends that we drop one of the basic points and Ambassador Ball believes we should drop all three. Our policy is to hold to all three conditions.



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(The President, continued)

If we restrict our actions by halting the bombing, they also have to restrict their actions in the DMZ, against cities, and accept GVN participation in the talks.

(Mr. Rostow handed the President a copy of the summary report of today's Tea Break in the Paris talks. Others had copies circulated during the meeting-- copy attached.) (Tab B)

The President: The North Vietnamese haven't agreed on a meeting. The summary of their attitude in Paris this morning adds up to zero. They have flatly refused to discuss anything before we halt the bombing.

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