

F - Sp. News -

January 9, 1980

MEMO: Meeting at the White House,
January 9, 1980, 8:00 - 9:15 a.m.
with Secretary of State Vance,
9:15 - 10:10 with President Carter

The invitation is attached. The meeting was not held in the Family Dining Room; it was held in the State Dining Room (the West Dining Room). The size of the group was not 15 or 20; it was about 40 outsiders and 5 insiders.

Some of the people in attendance included: John McCloy, Under Secretary of Commerce Luther Hodges, Secretary of Treasury Miller, Dave Packard, Gene Rostow, Walt Rostow, Walt Wriston, Winston Lord, Jim Schlesinger, Arthur Goldberg, a Black fellow named Robinson, two other Blacks I did not know, Mr. & Mrs. Averill Harriman, Anne Wexler, Jody Powell, Jerry Schecter, a man named Franklin, Bill Scranton, Fred Ikle, Ambassador Yost, Bill Highland, Lane Kirkland, Henry Cabot Lodge, George Ball, a man named Garcia from the GI forum whom I did not know, Henry Fowler, Bill Colby and others.

Vance talked for a long time. He said absolutely nothing new. He answered questions. At one point it was suggested to him that we not rule out selling weapons to China. He said our policy was to not sell weapons to China or the Soviet Union. Goldberg, who is becoming deaf, rambled on taking a lot of time. Goldberg and Packard urged there be a consensus of support for the President in the crisis. Gene Rostow put forward the Committee on Present Danger's position for increased Defense spending and acceleration of the Defense budget, a draft registration system, among other proposals. Schlesinger made probably the best remarks on the Middle East situation about Saudi Arabia. George Ball seemed to support the draft and registration system and the positioning of troops in the Middle East.



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Throughout the course of the President's and Vance's remarks, they indicated they saw the situation as serious, more serious than Czechoslovakia in 1968 or Hungary in 1956. They continually used words describing their management of it as being measured, restrained, ruling out things they were not doing, and predictable. My concern about it is that I think they are probably wrong. I think there is nothing wrong with the declaratory policy so that the Soviets know the things you want them to know that you are doing. I think, however, it uncomplicates the Soviet problem tremendously if you keep rushing out and saying that you are ruling out everything you are not doing. Further, it suggests to me they are, in effect, following the McNamara policy in Viet Nam - graduated and measured responses, which I think is unhelpful. A degree of unpredictability in a policy is a greater deterrent. Further, it confuses our allies and neutral countries, as well as our own citizens, as to how seriously we see the problem.

Various people mentioned increasing the Defense budget, draft registration, stationing troops in the Middle East. Carter and Vance talked about the fishing rights, aircraft routes, and reducing Soviet personnel in the United States.

After the meeting, I saw Vance and told him how wrong I thought they were with respect to the policy of constantly emphasizing how legal, how moral, how measured, how restrained they are. Every time they announce a new act, they rule out any other action. I said I thought that it unduly simplified the Soviets problem and was not helpful with allies, neutrals or our own people.

After Rostow and Schlesinger spoke, I made my only intervention saying, in effect, I agree with their comments, but I was worried beyond what actions we took about how we characterized what we were doing and how effective the signals were. I said that I was worried that for three years the Administration had been going in a different direction. It is staffed throughout with people who had a degree of momentum in that direction, and I sensed it was hard for some of those people at



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various levels to turn around. I said I felt this was possibly confusing to the Soviets and to the United States citizens, as well as to our allies and neutral nations. I mentioned, specifically, the pattern of saying such things as "Brezhnev has the same aspirations we do," that "we learned more in one week," and "being surprised when the Soviets lied."

I said to the Secretary of State, even your comment "we have a policy of not selling to the PRC or the Soviet Union" shocked me. It would leave a person with the impression that we were considering selling weapons and arms to the Soviet Union. The Soviets have invaded Afghanistan. For us to rearticulate our policy of not selling to the Chinese or the Soviets suggests that nothing has changed - a lot has changed. Quite apart from whether one agreed or disagreed with the policy, the idea of parroting those words is a bad signal for the world. It could lead someone to the misunderstanding that there is an absence of understanding of the seriousness of what the Soviets have done. If one agrees that this problem is more serious than Czechoslovakia or Hungary and as serious as the Italian invasion of Ethiopia or the Germans of Poland, and if one agrees there is no margin for error in the United States, then we have to avoid error. That involves both words and deeds.

My conclusion is they misled us by saying in the invitation a smaller group would be meeting in the Family Dining Room and then having the larger group. It was less a discussion and much more a briefing. I wish I had not gone.

I came away with the unfortunate conclusion that Carter and Vance are two of the people at various levels of the Administration who do not fully understand the gravity of the situation and are suffering most from the momentum of going in the opposite direction for the last three years.



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They are suffering from the human problem of having to reverse practically every policy they had, to deal with this crisis. The approach of refusing arms to Zia now has to be reversed. We have to help Pakistan. The approach of talking as though the intentions of the Soviets are benign when we now know they are not requires a whole new set of speech writers, a new set of Assistant Secretaries, and a new set of rhetoric to deal with what the realities of the world are. These two fellows are nice men. They clearly see the situation as grave, but they are having trouble turning around three years of effort in terms of cutting defense programs and being "measured," "careful," "cautious," "prudent," "friendly with the Soviets," "unfriendly with Pakistan," "unfriendly with South Korea," and "unfriendly with the nations that have been helpful to us around the world."

After the meeting, I was walking toward the northwest gate; the press came up. I talked to them for about ten to fifteen minutes. I suppose I am old fashioned, but I cannot quite bring myself to going out and taking advantage of the opportunity to drop a load on the President. Instead, I was measured. They asked, "Is this a sales job by the President?" I said, "The President was doing that which a political leader in our society ought to do--namely, talking to people and attempting to build a base of support for policies that he believes are in our country's interest. That is a legitimate function." They asked if I agreed with the President. I said, "Most everyone in the country agrees with those steps he is taking to demonstrate to the Soviet Union that that kind of behavior is fundamentally unacceptable." They said, "Do you disagree in areas?" I said, "I do not think this is an appropriate place to get into it."

After the meeting, Joe Sisco (who also made an intervention during the meeting which was forceful saying that we not only had to put troops in the Middle East, we had to put them in a way that it was clear they were going to stay there for a while and contribute to a degree of stability - none of this put them in, jerk them out business.) said to me, "You have just heard



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the answer to the problem you posed. Carter is among the worst in the sense that he has that momentum going in the opposite direction." Sisco felt that Vance had handled himself pretty well. I said to Joe, "I agreed with him on President Carter, but it was not clear to me Vance really was dealing with it effectively. He is too hung-up on all the diplomatic niceties, the U.N., the Security Council, and all of that trash in New York that does not amount to enough to fill a thimble in terms of substance in the world and what is actually going in the Soviet Union."

They also talked about their grain position.

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