Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: December 5, 1950

SUBJECT: MEETING IN THE SECRETARY'S OFFICE, December 5, 1950, 10:00 a.m.

PARTICIPANTS:
Mr. Johnson
Mr. Webb
Mr. Matthews
Mr. Jessup
Mr. Bush
Mr. Merchant
Mr. Eise
Mr. Perkins
Mr. Harriman
Mr. Keenan
Mr. McMillan

The Secretary opened the meeting by saying that he had had a meeting last night with Ambassador Franks, Mr. Bevin and Scott of the British party, Mr. Bush and Mr. Jessup. The Secretary said he had suggested to Ambassador Franks that he attempt to work out with Mr. Attlee a means of getting a more relaxed attitude at future meetings with the President. He suggested to Franks that he ask Attlee to allow his subordinates at the meeting to initiate discussion on the subjects which came up.

The meeting which was held at 5:30 p.m. yesterday (December 4) was rather rigid and too many people were in attendance. The Secretary asked Mr. Harriman to speak to the President along this line and said he would do the same if he had the opportunity.

The Secretary said he could summarize the meeting at the White House yesterday in a few words. He said that Mr. Attlee had taken the position that at this time we had no choice except to negotiate with the Chinese. These negotiations would, of course, extend beyond Korea and it was certain the price the Chinese demanded would be Formosa, a seat in the UN, and recognition. The President stated that we were not prepared to proceed on this line and that was about all that the meeting produced.

In the meeting in the Secretary's office last night the Secretary informed the British that we could not separate our foreign policy into two compartments - the Far East and the European.

The Secretary went on to say that Americans would not accept a surrender in the Far East in accord with the desire of some of our Allies and then cooperate in Europe with the same Allies who have urged us to be conciliatory in the Far East.
Americans demand that we must be vigorous everywhere. The Secretary said he tried to point out to the British that the consequences to their proposal was greater than they thought. He said that you can not, as the British seem to want to do, make a distinction between little aggressions and big aggressions. The British seem to be saying that we would take action to put down little aggressions but if a big aggression came along they would say that is a different matter and not act against it.

The Secretary pointed out to the British that if we accept surrender Japan cannot be expected to stay with us. If we accept surrender, we would be conceding that Russia and China are the most powerful forces in the Far East and as a result that all Asians would hurry to make the best deals they could with them.

In answer to the Secretary's presentation, Ambassador Franks said that the British felt that we were basing our position on a moral position but since our power had collapsed they felt we would have to change our moral position. The Secretary replied to Ambassador Franks by saying that he did not want to argue this but would rather examine the question to see whether this was a position which we could defend vigorously.

Mr. Rusk pointed out that we are now more powerful militarily than we were at the beginning of the Korean war. He based this statement on the fact that we had taken many measures as a result of the Korean war which have put us in a much stronger position militarily; and, although we have had and will have considerable personal losses in Korea we are non-the-less in a stronger position militarily. He said that he conceded that we have lost prestige but we have not lost power.

The Secretary reported that the British then proceeded to argue against our proposals. He said he thought the British arguments would demonstrate some weaknesses in our line of action and that we should re-examine it closely. In brief he outlined our proposals as follows: (1) fight as hard as we can; (2) if someone proposes a cease fire, we will accept it but we will not pay anything for it; (3) if a cease fire is not accepted or is accepted and the Chinese later start fighting again, we will start again and we must fight the best we can — we will not run out; and, (d) if we are thrown out, we will try to harass the Chinese all we can by economic blockade or such action as we may be able to take. Under no circumstances would we agree to turn over Formosa as a condition to settle.

The British countered by saying that our position is one of getting thrown out of Korea by maintaining a position to harass China which would get us no where even though we were to carry it on for years. In addition, they pointed out that such action would make the British position in Hong Kong untenable. The British think that this would weaken everyone and alienate our friends. They said that the Chinese now thought that we were wrong about Formosa.
Persons and that this, of course, would further alienate them. They believe that if we pursue this course, the Asians would probably not join the Soviet camp but would probably rather neutralize themselves into a third force.

The Secretary countered by saying that the Asians would probably do that anyway and he did not think we should pay a price for Asian opinion.

This brought the meeting of last night to the question of what should we do.

The Secretary had proposed to the British that we proceed with the first steps in the UN as now scheduled and that we follow this by filing the resolution voiced in the Security Council to demonstrate that we have not changed our position. In the meantime, if some other party proposes a cease fire, he would like to see that passed quickly so that there would be no negotiation first on the price of a cease fire. The British agreed to take this up with the Prime Minister to see if he would agree to this.

This ends the summary of the meeting with the British last night.

The meeting then turned to a discussion of what course of action might be available to us. Mr. Nita opened by saying that if there was no cease fire order and the pressure continued on us militarily, he would favor giving consideration to blowing up the dams on the Yalu River. Mr. Harriman said he thought this had merit since the Russians would depend on the industrial capacity of Manchuria in any war in the Far East and by destroying the major source of power we would then cripple that potential.

The discussion then turned to the question of whether or not a harassment of China would cause the Soviets to take military action. Mr. Kennan said he did not think that this would be the case. He said that it might happen coincidentally but that Russia would not take military action purely because of our harassment of China. He pointed out that the Russian desire is to split the Allies where ever they can. If they can do that, it makes military action less necessary. He pointed out that our harassment of Chinese would tend to split the Allies on that point and the Russians would consider this a very favorable turn of events.

Mr. Jessup said that he thought if we were to hold our Allies in Europe we must be prepared to agree to a meeting with the Soviets. Mr. Harriman said that he thought the way to hold unity is to move ahead on the European military organization.

Mr. Kennan then said that he did not think that what we have to do in the Far East need be a petulant effort of annoyance to the Chinese. He said that we have worried for years whether or not we are popular with other governments and we have bent over backwards to try to make them trust us and like us. He said the Chinese have now committed an affront of the greatest magnitude to the United States. He said that what they have done is something that we
can not forget for years and the Chinese will have the worry of righting themselves with us not us with them. He felt that we should take our time in deciding what we do. He said we owe China nothing but a lesson. He said he thought we should attempt to get a stance and understanding with the British that we have different views on the matter of China but that we must do what we must do and they should accept and understand that and be willing to cooperate at least on other things.

At this point, Mr. Jessup said that he was concerned as to whether our Ambassador in the field were fully enough informed of our position in order that they might make it plain to the governments to which they are accredited. There was unanimous agreement that we should make a greater effort to see that our Ambassadors were informed and Mr. Rusk agreed to undertake this.

Mr. Rusk said that he felt our position with the British today should be that we intend to go ahead with our UN program and leave to them the problem of maintaining unity and the case of not calling the Chinese action an aggression if they wish. He again pointed out that we cannot accept the British proposal because this is a big aggression rather than a little aggression. Mr. Rusk thought that the spirit of proceeding in this matter was to show the world that we are not appealing and if the UN did not support our program they would be the appeasers and not we.

At this point, Mr. Perkes entered the meeting to report that Ambassador Bruce had just sent a message saying that the French are ready to agree to our position if the Secretary would send Mr. Schuman a letter along the same lines of the message sent to him last week. Ambassador Bruce has also asked for a telecon this morning on this subject and the Secretary said that if the telecon verified the facts above he thought it important that we push the British to get ahead with the European Defense Force Program as rapidly as possible.

Returning to the Korean situation, the Secretary suggested that we might propose to the British that if the Chinese accept a cease fire we will stop shooting but we are not sure they will accept by. We would then be willing to exchange agreements with the British on the protection of Australia and New Zealand. We would then see how vigorously we could proceed in Europe. We could tell the British if they would do certain things, we do many — such as sending additional forces to the Continent, maintaining a supreme commander, etc. We could ask the British to help this program along and not back.

The discussion then turned to the question of a stopping point in the UN if we were unable to make satisfactory progress. The consensus of the group seemed to be that if no cease fire resolution is passed, we should then pass the original resolution calling for the Chinese to withdraw from Korea. If the Chinese do not comply with this resolution, we should make it plain that
we consider that the US has done all it can and is no longer in control of the situation. We would then be able to act unilaterally as we see fit. At this point, 11.30 a.m., Mr. Battle informed the Secretary that the British Ambassador and his delegation were in the Secretary's reception room to see him and all except the Secretary, Mr. Rock, Mr. Jessup and Mr. Harrison withdrew from the room.

W. J. McWilliams

[Stamp: Classified by authority of [Redacted]]

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