DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: December 3, 1950

SUBJECT: Report of the Secretary's meeting at the White House with the President, General Marshall and General Bradley

PARTICIPANTS: The Secretary Mr. Biss
Mr. Webb Mr. Egan
Mr. Matthews Mr. Jessup
Mr. Hickerson Mr. Sheppard
Mr. Nile

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The meeting was called so that the Secretary could report the discussion which he had had with the President, General Marshall and General Bradley at the White House late last night.

The Secretary said that he had raised in the meeting with the President the question whether our position in the world required us to continue hostilities with the Chinese Communists. He said he had advanced the viewpoint that if that were the case, it would mean that we would have to examine the policies governing our other actions to conform to that situation. He had further stated that if our world position did not require us to continue hostilities with the Chinese Communists, then it would be necessary to try to stop the fighting in Korea before the disintegration moved too far in order to save our forces.

The Secretary said that he went on to say that so far as the evacuation was concerned, it seemed to him to break down into three parts—the East Coast, Inchon and Pusan.

With respect to the East Coast the Secretary said he indicated that, so far as he was concerned, this operation is solely concerned with saving troops. He told the President that there was nothing to be gained politically by making a stand there. The problem was simply to do what you could to get them out. The Secretary told the President that he didn't wish this to appear as advice because it was a strictly military matter. However, if the military did need some kind of political action, such as a cease fire, in order to carry out the evacuation on the East Coast, then the military should let us know.
With respect to Inchon, the Secretary said he had advanced his opinion that for a couple of days, there were no decisions which had to be made. He confirmed that General Marshall will probably have his hands full getting the troops to Inchon during this period. After that, it would seem to be a normal operation to remove wounded troops and disorganized units first. The Secretary said he told the group that as far as he was concerned these troops which were not combat effective should be removed. The Secretary said he had told the group that if there was a question as to where these troops should be relaxed and re-equipped, he would suggest Japan over Korea.

The Secretary said that he had discussed the additional question as to what to do with the South Koreans. The Secretary had said that it would be dreadful to abandon them far from their homes and that he felt they should be picked up some way or other and relaxed in South Korea to filter back to their homes. He said that he had stressed that the main thing, though, was not to abandon them. General Marshall and General Bradley agreed that this was very important.

The Secretary said that he then discussed his viewpoint that it was essential to get some kind of censorship in the Far Eastern Command immediately. He said it would be much better if General McNaughton were to have no additional press conferences in which he speculated about the possible courses of action, and the dire consequences which would flow from alternate courses. The President replied that he might just have to order censorship invoked. In response to this, General Marshall indicated that this would be a rather difficult thing to do.

The Secretary said that the question then came up about the price we would have to pay for the events in Korea. The Secretary said he replied to this that we were tending to dwell on a false dichotomy. The Secretary said he suggested that we should not gut our minds on action in the United Nations. The Secretary said he suggested perhaps we should think along the lines of a cease fire at the 38th parallel. He raised the question whether such a resolution might be rejected. If it is accepted, the Secretary said, we will need to understand that we can't do things like bomb Manchuria and will be required to observe it ourselves; on the other hand, if we think the probabilities are that it will not be accepted, then that would be another thing. In any event, the Secretary said that he had assured the President that we would carefully analyze the possibilities and prepare a possible course of political action.

The Secretary said that he felt that the President would want to listen to Prime Minister Attlee and see what the general temper is of our allies. The Secretary said that he was sure the President was not prepared, at this point at least, to negotiate with anyone, or to ask for a cease fire.

Mr. Breeden said that Ambassador Grosz had called from New York to say that Mr. Dulles and the whole senior staff recommended that we go ahead in the General Assembly with the resolution which was voted in the Security Council. Mr. Grosz had talked to Mr. Younger who was very reluctant to go ahead with the resolution with respect to Chinese Communist aggression in Korea. Mr. Younger urged
urged that we await Mr. Attlee’s arrival and give Mr. Younger an opportunity to talk to Mr. Attlee about it first. Mr. Hickerson said that if he had the Secretary’s approval he would move right away and talk with the British on going ahead with steps 1, 2 and possibly 3 (in the telegram to USSR).

Mr. Hickerson said that this brought us to face with the question whether we go ahead with steps 1 and 2 alone if the British disagree with us. The Secretary remarked that it is imperative that we not get separated from the British on the eve of Mr. Attlee’s arrival. Mr. Jessup asked whether we would in fact become separated from them if they don’t agree. Mr. Jessup said perhaps it would be possible to go ahead alone on steps 1 and 2, assuring the British that we won’t do anything toward introducing a resolution until we consult further with them.

The Secretary summed this up by saying the question was “If the British and the other sponsors of the old resolution disagree with putting this item on the agenda, do we want to put it on alone with Mr. Attlee arriving the next day?” The Secretary said he was inclined to think we shouldn’t go ahead alone, and it was left that way.
The following items appear in my notes and are therefore included in this supplementary memorandum.

At the outset of the conversation, General Marshall said the situation looked very bad indeed. General Bradley also took an extremely pessimistic view of the military situation and thought that not more than 60 to 72 hours would elapse before it reached a crash state.

General Bradley thought that the troops of the Tenth Corps could be evacuated in five days at least but wondered about the manner of the evacuation unless the cease-fire were secured. He thought the 7th Division might be saved and that the 3rd Division was nearer the ports and could get out. He thought we might lose Wonsan but might hold Hungnam. He said we could not take our troops out and leave the ROK Capital and other divisions behind.

General Marshall said that even a Bismarck type of evacuation might be prejudiced if the Chinese brought in their air.

The President raised the question of General MacArthur's view about the need of operations across the frontier.

The Secretary repeated what he had previously said to General Marshall, namely, that the decision should be based solely on whether it would help or hurt our troops. We need a very good military judgment as to whether knocking out the Chinese airfields would bring in the Russians. This decision should not be made by MacArthur but by General Marshall on the advice of General Collins, who should stay in Tokyo. We should not take this action for the purpose of holding Korea or merely for the purpose of retaliating against the Chinese but only for the purpose of permitting the evacuation of our troops, if necessary.

The Secretary stressed the importance of having at least the appearance of consultation with Atlee before definitive action was taken.

General Marshall indicated that we might have only 48 hours in which to reach a decision and we could not wait for the first meeting scheduled for Tuesday afternoon. General Marshall suggested it would be better to have Mr. Atlee suggest a settlement rather than having us bear the burden of making the suggestion.