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Thursday, October 26, 1967
4:25 p.m.

59
Pres file

Mr. President:

Herewith Sec. Rusk recommends
a postponement of the Asian Summit to
February or March 1968.

W. W. Rostow

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WWRostow:rlh

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4(b)

White House Guidelines, Feb. 24, 1983

By rlh, NARA, Date 11-6-91

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

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E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

NIJ 94-451

October 26, 1967

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By CG, NARA, Date 3-30-95

59a

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Dates for a Possible Summit Meeting of
the Manila Nations.

Recommendations:

A. That, unless there should develop strong pressures for a summit meeting in late November/early December from the South Vietnamese or other governments, you now tentatively decide that the USG will look toward a date in early 1968.

Approve _____ Disapprove _____

B. Specifically, that you authorize the Vice President to discuss the matter quietly with President Thieu and the senior delegates of other Manila powers at the South Vietnamese inauguration, indicating that this is your tentative view but listening carefully to see if there are any strong pressures for an earlier date.

Approve _____ Disapprove _____

Discussion:

During the Clifford/Taylor trip, the general sentiment in all capitals seemed favorable to a summit meeting in late November or early December, and Messrs. Clifford and Taylor adopted a sympathetic posture toward this possibility. It was of course fully understood that the new South Vietnamese Government would have to be installed, and that the date would take careful working out. A general consensus appeared to be developing that Seoul would be the best location, and the Thai and Koreans subsequently met together and virtually announced as much.

Since then, a number of key judgments have moved in the

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direction of postponing the date until February or March 1968. Recent reported reactions have been as follows:

a. President Thieu has not expressed any recent view, but the absence of any expression, in itself, suggests that he is in no hurry.

b. Ambassador Bunker last week recorded his clear view that the new GVN will not have had time to organize itself properly by mid-November and that the required preparations for a summit meeting would divert it from the key priority tasks which we all regard as critical to continued and increased progress in South Viet-Nam. Ambassador Bunker also expressed doubt whether there was anything really new that could be decided or stated at a summit in the November/December time frame. Conversely, he thought that, by next February, the new GVN should have begun to show clear indications of its effectiveness and support, and that a summit conference in that time period could usefully dramatize successes and indicate policies to deal with remaining problems.

c. Although Prime Minister Holt had earlier been strongly inclined to the November/December period, he is now reliably reported as believing that the best time for a meeting would be late February. We have not heard from New Zealand, but surmise that their view would be similar.

d. The Koreans and Thai have notably not been pressing for an early summit, and the Australians tell us that Thanat of Thailand has told them that the Koreans and Thai, in private conversations, had looked toward a date "early next year."

e. We have no real word from the Philippines, but our Embassy believes that a summit before the renewal appropriation on the Philippine force in Viet-Nam could have significant disadvantages in Manila.

In my own judgment, Bunker's arguments have great weight. Thieu has been very slow in forming his government and may not

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even have a cabinet by the time of his inauguration. He also faces the fact that the new Assembly must settle down and must approve the 1968 budget, if the Constitution is observed literally by the end of the year. It seems abundantly clear that all parts of the GVN will have their hands and plates full in the first two months of the new set-up.

Moreover, recent developments of which you are aware make it extremely unlikely that any useful initiative toward peace could be framed or put forward at a summit meeting. This would mean that a summit meeting would be essentially a statement by the GVN of what it was doing and hoped to do, and the story in late November and early December is unlikely to be strong or dramatic. I share the general feeling that what we want now is deeds, not words, and that even the words should come from the GVN, standing alone, to the maximum possible extent. While Bunker does not specifically mention this factor in connection with summit dates, my own reading is that the new and potentially constructive spirit of nationalism in Saigon would be most sensitive to any appearance of group decisions or of the new GVN "reporting to the board of directors" before it has laid out its own programs and started to carry them out.

In sum, I now see what seem to me overwhelming arguments in the foreign policy sphere against a November/December date. I realize, of course, that you must judge the relative convenience of such a date as compared to a date in February or March; I would suppose that Congressional pressures will remain great through November and early December, but they may be equally so in early 1968.

In any event, if you were to decide in the direction of the November/December period, we would have a tough uphill job to persuade others and to get the arrangements properly made for a successful meeting. This, however, is wholly secondary to the arguments of substance that I believe weigh against the November/December dates.

In my judgment, the issue now requires at least a tentative decision on your part, particularly with the Vice President

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meeting Thieu and such senior delegates as Hasluck, the Korean Prime Minister, and others, in Saigon next week. I have phrased my recommendations in terms of feeling out to see whether there is any remaining strong pressure for the November/December time period, and not in any sense irrevocably committing the U.S. Government at this stage. You could make a final decision in the light of the reports and judgments of the Vice President after his Saigon visit.

Dean Rusk

Dean Rusk

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