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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
THE NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDANT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20313

8 March 1968

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MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Meeting with President Truman at Independence, Missouri, 7 March 1968

I met with President Truman for one hour at his home in Independence, Missouri, on 7 March 1968. (Two meetings tentatively scheduled previously had been cancelled by Mr. Truman's office at his request.) During the meeting, I covered the Pueblo incident, and gave a general review of the war in Vietnam.

With regard to the Pueblo, I told Mr. Truman that the ship was on an intelligence-gathering mission, having left Sasebo, Japan, on 11 January, and that so far as is known nothing out of the ordinary occurred until its seizure on 23 January off Wonsan, North Korea. I told him that the ship was located in international waters when seized, some 15 miles from the nearest land, and that we have no information indicated that the ship violated territorial waters at any time. Its orders specifically required it to stay at least 13 miles offshore. We cannot, of course, be completely certain there was no violation until we have access to the crew and the log. It appears that much, although perhaps not all, of the classified documents and equipment aboard were destroyed. Some of it may have been recovered by the North Koreans. I then summarized what is being done now through diplomatic channels drawing upon information furnished me by Mr. Bromley Smith, including a summary of the positions currently being taken by the North Koreans and by the United States. Mr. Truman had no specific comment on the Pueblo matter.

I next gave him a summary review of the Vietnam war, covering in brief outline the geography of the country, the development of the war in the last few years, the objectives of both sides, the principal forces engaged, the general operational plan and major efforts being exerted by both sides, the overall progress being made up to the ^{Tet} attacks, the Tet attacks and their resulting effects to date, the Khe Sanh situation, and the major issues and problem areas that

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now exist. Mr. Truman followed the discussion with keen interest and close attention, with a number of comments and questions.

After my explanation of the situation in early and mid-'65 resulting in the introduction of U. S. forces at a time when the South Vietnamese were close to defeat, Mr. Truman commented that the President did what had to be done in his opinion. With regard to objectives, I told him that the aim of the North Vietnamese seems clearly to be the take-over of South Vietnam and the imposition of NVN rule throughout North and South Vietnam, and that their determination to pursue this objective is shown in the losses and the destruction they are sustaining. On our side the President has stated our overall objective as seeking an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam, as well as an honorable peace that will leave the people of South Vietnam free to fashion their own institutions without terror or intimidation from the North. Military objectives to this end include imposing costs on North Vietnam to cause them to cease support and direction of the insurgency, defeat of the VC and NVA in South Vietnam, and extension of GVN dominion over South Vietnam, as well as deterring the Chinese Communists from intervention.

I next reviewed the major forces involved on both sides. Mr. Truman was much interested in the fact that the NVA main force units now in South Vietnam are larger than the VC units--thus it is in no sense a civil war.

I reviewed the general progress of the war over the past few years, noting the increase in population under GVN control from one-half in 1965 to two-thirds in 1967, the improvement in the ratio of weapons lost from about 1 to 1 in 1965 to 6 to 1 in 1967. I also commented on the growth of pacification teams and the increase in the number of secure hamlets. Finally I noted the political progress evidenced by the election in which more than 80% (more than four and a half million) of the registered adults voted. This well disproves any charge that the Vietnamese are indifferent about freedom and development.

I reviewed in outline the principal operations now being conducted, including the land campaign in South Vietnam, the B-52 and other air operations, sea surveillance, the anti-infiltration system, the pacification program in South Vietnam, the operations

against the lines of communications in Laos, and the air and naval operations against North Vietnam.

I next covered the Tet offensive, bringing out that the attack was launched suddenly during the holiday period; that 5 cities, 35 of 44 province capitals, 36 district towns, many villages and hamlets and some 24 airfields were attacked; that approximately 60,000 enemy troops participated of whom 40,000 were killed in the first three weeks, and over 5,000 captured, as well as 10,000 weapons lost to us, while 3,000 South Vietnamese were killed and 1,000 U.S. The ARVN units were at half strength celebrating Tet, but they responded well and bore the brunt of the attack. U.S. forces supported in 6 cities, but for a limited number of days except at Hue where the battle lasted nearly a month. The losses and other effects on both sides have been heavy and severe. On our side, 60,000 homes were destroyed, many businesses were destroyed or damaged, 4700 civilians were killed and 500,000 refugees resulted. The economy has been set back, and pacification hard hit in at least 13 provinces, where it may take six months to regain pre-attack levels. Local government has been disrupted in many areas and confidence shaken. ARVN units have been drawn into the cities, and the countryside left exposed in many areas. However, on the enemy side losses have been severe; no "uprising" occurred as anticipated; and a hardened attitude now exists toward the NV/VC. The government response has been generally effective, although their success in meeting the heavy additional refugee problem is yet to be demonstrated. President Truman ~~expressed particular appreciation for the report on these attacks; he commented that it had been hard for him to get a full picture.~~

I next reviewed the situation in the Khe Sanh area, bringing out that we have a strong force (4 Marine battalions, heavily reinforced) in the area, with powerful artillery and air support, and with more than 2 divisions available in the northern part of South Vietnam as reinforcements if needed. Heavy B-52 and tactical air support is being provided. Although the weather handicaps logistic support to the Khe Sanh force, our commanders have confidence in their ability to deal with enemy attack. ~~President Truman expressed appreciation for this picture of the situation in light of concern he had felt as a result of press accounts.~~

Finally I gave him a brief survey of some of the major issues and problem areas to which our government has been giving its attention (and to which it will probably continue to do so). The

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first is the pressure to "stop the bombing". Here I referred to the President's San Antonio formula, and to the risks to our troops if the bombing were stopped and the North Vietnamese took advantage of the cessation. Mr. Truman said that he didn't think it was possible to go any further than the President has gone in his offer. I next mentioned the continuing problem of infiltration of men and material through Laos and Cambodia, and the enemy use of those areas as bases. He was gratified to know that we are attacking enemy movements and bases in Laos; I told him that the Cambodia problem is receiving continuing study. I next mentioned the necessity for maintaining the tactical initiative in light of the increased forces the North Vietnamese are sending down from the north and the possibility that more forces will be needed on our side in order to avoid finding ourselves on the defensive. ~~He said it is of great importance to avoid being thrown on the defensive.~~ I next noted the importance of finding ways of protecting cities and the countryside, improving local security and eliminating the structure of Viet Cong cells and sympathizers. This problem, together with restoring the momentum of pacification and development, is receiving urgent attention of our authorities in Vietnam at the present time.

The meeting ended with ~~President Truman's expression of appreciation for the briefing and for the thoughtfulness of the President in making it possible.~~


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