



H. R. Haldeman Diaries Collection, January 18, 1969 – April 30, 1973

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Friday, May 12th. The problem at the staff meeting this morning was raised on the news Defense put out last night that they're getting ready to go for supplemental appropriations in '72 and '73, because of the increased cost of Vietnam. Strong feeling in the staff meeting was that we should not allow them to do this, although some, such as Colson, thought it was a good idea. Also had a problem with Defense saying that the blockade wasn't going to work and that we were faced with interdiction problems, this was on the news too. So we have to tighten up on them and some of what they're doing.

Haig gave a briefing at the staff meeting. He did a superb job of explaining the background, making the point that on Vietnamization, we've always cut corners out there to meet the political problems at home, and that the current situation is not a failure of Vietnamization, it's the challenge of it. In January, the President made a basic decision against General Abrams's recommendation not to wipe out the North Vietnamese buildup above the DMZ. He did this because of the public reaction at home and because there had been no attack on their part to provide us with open, open provocation. Then he engaged at that time in a monumental diplomacy effort, which, of course, didn't work. Then came the North Vietnamese invasion across the DMZ. Haig points out that there are two fundamental changes in the concept of Vietnamization. First, the DMZ restriction was violated, as were the '68 understandings. We thought that ICOR was relatively secure to the North, and weren't worrying about that in the Vietnamization program. Secondly, there was the change from a guerrilla warfare to traditional war, which was not perceived by our planners: this has been marked by first, increased anti-aircraft. Second, long range artillery on a massive basis. Third, intensified density of armor -tanks primarily; and this created problems, since we had cut everything to the bone anyway on the basis of our original concept. Also the density of our helicopters is severely cut, so they don't have the aerial supply or troop mobility that they had before. He also pointed out that there's a fundamental shift in the strategic environment.



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Audio Cassette 21, Side B, Withdrawn Item Number 20 [AC-21(B) Sel 18]  
Duration: 28 seconds

The Chinese and the Soviets have both broken away from each other and to an extent from Vietnam, North Vietnam. Peking especially has a desire to neutralize or break Hanoi from Moscow. The Soviets have a vital interest in our initiatives. Brezhnev has staked his career on it. They've got to quiet down their relations with the West, because they're targeted on the Chinese.

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So this was not a knee-jerk action on the part of the President to save US honor. It was the action of a world leader who has developed a worldwide concept in a way that it's tied to his ability to function. The public image problem now is that we're too far to the dovish side; we've sold out. For example, according to Brinkley...

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...the key here though is that we're fracturing the Moscow-Hanoi linkage, and we have to China pushed away from this.

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He went into much more detail on the military concepts also.



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The President called first thing in the morning saying that, he's up at Camp David for the weekend, and he was saying that Kissinger was worried because his meeting with the Senate Doves had been called off, and that he was depressed about the news coverage, especially regarding the Summit. The President told him to relax that a cancellation of the Summit cuts both ways and that it won't hurt us. I talked to Henry later, and he said the President couldn't be more wrong, he wasn't the least depressed. The President also said Haig thinks that Monday was the turning point in the war that the psychology has turned; that the use of air power has changed the whole situation.

He told me to go ahead and see Connally, which I did at 10:30, and we agreed that, we'd go ahead on the announcement Monday. I, in turn, made a pitch for putting it off for a couple of weeks. Connally pitched strongly that it was to the President's interests for him to leave this next week, and get it done with before he goes off to Russia. He did agree that if the Summit got canceled over the weekend he would, of course, hold off for a couple of weeks. He also came up with an idea that he said is kicking around the Defense Department, that he thought should get to the President, which is to send out one member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in an overall command position for a limited period, in charge of all Southeast Asia. And then as a corollary, to make Bunker Ambassador Extraordinaire for all Southeast Asia, to really coordinate all the activities, political and military,...

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...and try to build some Southeast Asian mercenary forces to go in for sabotage and that kind of thing.

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He then made the strong pitch that Zumwalt was the guy to do this. He had 20 months out there; knows all the operations, amphibious warfare; is imaginative and creative; full of drive and commitment. I mentioned this to the President and he didn't buy that. He did buy the Connally announcement next week, but asks that we hold until Tuesday, and have the understanding that we'll cancel the announcement if the Summit is canceled.

End of May 12th.

Oh, the other item on May 12th. There was a lot of concern during the day about speculation on the Soviet Summit, and the President and Henry both pushed very hard to have everybody kept quiet on any kind of speculation.

Henry met with Dobrynin in the afternoon, and the discussion was so strongly substantive that both Henry and the President now believe that there's no chance of the Summit being canceled. They even got to the question of the exchange of gifts: the Soviets want to give the President a hydrofoil to play with in Key Biscayne, and in return, Brezhnev wants a hot sports car from us.

The President called me a couple of times, emphasizing the need to get to everybody to keep quiet on speculations, since there had been some optimistic stories in the press this afternoon.



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End of May 12th.