



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

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Wednesday, February 3.

The President originally had an NSC meeting scheduled for this morning but canceled it as a result of his long conversation last night with Henry after the "Evening at the White House". Apparently, Henry had become very concerned about the TV news reports regarding the Laos buildup, and especially about Dan Rather reporting that the President had met with the Action group late yesterday afternoon, and that they were trying to persuade him not to go ahead with plans for action. On the basis of that, Henry felt that they probably should cancel the plans and hold up on the Phase II operation.

This-- the President put off a decision on it, though, until this morning and said that he wanted the NSC meeting canceled and, instead, he wanted to meet with Mitchell, Connally, and me to review the bidding. We had that meeting at about 9:30. The President first spent some time with Henry and then called me in before the others arrived and reviewed the bidding on the situation to date, and what he considered the options to be. Henry's argument was that the bureaucracy was so completely out of control that we wouldn't be able to hold them into line if we went ahead and that, therefore, we should do so. By this morning, however, both Henry and the President had pretty much changed their minds and swung back to feeling that we should go ahead with the operation, on the basis that if the President now allowed himself to be talked out of it, in effect by the press reports which had been leaked from State and Defense, that he would lose any hope of controlling the bureaucracy. My argument was that that had some validity, but even more important was the fact that we needed the move in order to ensure our continuing safe withdrawal, and also that I feel strongly that the proposed negatives that the others offer are certainly not assured, and in my view, not even probable. That is, I don't think the reaction in Congress or on the campuses, or in the press, or with the public is going to be nearly as strong or adverse as we are assuming it might be. Mitchell and Connally had pretty much the same views.

Our meeting lasted for two hours, and the President took a great deal of time to lay the case out very succinctly with all of its ramifications, and also had Henry fill in on some of the factors



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involved. Connally took a very strong position along basically the same lines that I had, arguing that it was well worth taking some risks now, and that we could ride it through, and that we should do so to protect our position next year. The President had outlined that we-- this will be our last chance for any major positive action since we won't be able to do anything after the dry season ends, and next year we won't have enough troops in place to be able to do anything. Mitchell bought this argument too, but didn't like the idea of the argument the President was making of the need to do this in order to maintain his leadership position in the bureaucracy. John felt the decision should not be made on those grounds, and both Connally and I agreed. There was no question within that room, however, that everyone by the end of the meeting felt strongly that we should go ahead with Phase II.

The President had me back in and discussed some more concern on how to get a hold of all this and also some concern on the PR side of it. And he wanted me to work closely with Henry on that. Fortunately, because of the earlier developments, I guess, Henry asked me to attend the WSAG meeting and he also asked Ziegler to attend the first part of it. I tried to leave when Ziegler did, after we had discussed the basic PR plan for the Cambodian operation tonight, and for the removal of the embargo on the Laotian press coverage tomorrow. Ziegler left at that time and so did I, but Henry came up and called me back down to go over the whole scenario for the Laotian operation Sunday night. And I did so and contributed-- participated in all of the PR thinking. As a result of this, the President has concluded that this is probably the best way to handle this thing from now on, that is, for me to sit in all critical meetings, and to force attention and consideration of Congressional and PR factors when they're making the decisions, and force them not to let that kind of decision be made by the Generals and Under Secretaries. I think this will probably work pretty well, and it will, of course, be fascinating to do, as it was to sit in the WSAG meeting today and review the whole scenario for the operation.

After that meeting, the President called me over to the EOB, where he had been working in the afternoon, and I reviewed the bidding with him briefly. Kissinger walked in, in the middle of it,



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and we discussed it further. The President confirmed that he does want to go ahead and wants Henry to give the execute order.

We had a rather interesting episode as the President's appointment for Dr. Riland came due, and he proceeded to take off his clothes and go into the outer room and have us sit down and continue the discussion with him while Riland wrenched his back and went through his manipulations. Following the Riland treatment and after he had left, the President sat in one of the chairs in his outer office with just his shorts on and pursued the conversation a little further. Then Henry and I left with the understanding that the plan was set and we would go ahead.

End of February 3.