



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

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Thursday, March 20.

Cabinet meeting, mainly to hit them on the budget. First a long briefing and discussion about ABM. Laird briefed, then President got into quite a dialog with various members. He went a bit far in his desire to convince them that we have very valid reasons for the decision and revealed a lot of highly classified information regarding pictures. I interrupted and pointed out the nature of the material.

Main thrust was that we have to have real military superiority and defense as a base for negotiations. President stated flatly that war will be over by next year - but that it must be understood that the next four or five months will be very tough because we have to take public position that outlook is tough, etc. , while we negotiate in private. Rogers said his answer to criticism that we have no planned strategy is that we do have one and that it is that we will not tell anyone what it is. Based on position that the only productive negotiations are the private ones - and as soon as we tell anyone about them, they're not private.

Then Cabinet went to budget briefings by Mayo, Kennedy and McCracken. President had carefully pre-staged this with them yesterday - to take very hard line about necessity for cuts. After briefing he moved to executive session - and (I guess) really put it to them. Meeting lasted three hours - twice as long as scheduled.

I spent rest of day in various meetings, including lunch with Walter Thayer regarding OEO. President had a bunch of appointments, then Chowder and Marching reception and Business Council dinner. I didn't even get in to get the afternoon stuff signed because I was in a meeting with Flanigan's office regarding Consumer Office and President left for home.

Still a stir regarding domestic program. Not organized right yet. Burns and Moynihan both feel strongly that President not putting enough time or attention on this and that nothing will be settled until he does. I think they're right. This morning he flatly rejected Head Start and Job



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Corps proposals without even really reading them. Just wants them changed --or preferably abolished.

President comments to Cabinet, regarding the need for military strength as a basis for successful negotiating - the intellectuals are all opposed to this approach - "It's only us non-intellectuals who understand what the game is all about."