

dinner with Washington Nieman Fellows

Partial Notes:

Bureaucratic pressures to concentrate on current crises- My greatest nightmare is that someone will call me with a crisis in the middle of the night on a subject I have not focused on.

Found that bureaucratic prerogatives often more important than the elements of a subject--the interplay of personalities and the interplay of bureaucracies.

Everyone who sees the President wants something... everyone has saved up for this opportunity and has a long list and thinks this is his opportunity to get a decision...this goes on 10 hours a day.

Q. & A.:

Why didn't Pres. mention Mideast in State Union?

A- (briefly discussed how Pres. writes speeches). He writes most of the speech himself. I know that is the traditional "fiction," but in this case tis true. He writes much of his speeches himself and he wrote the greatest part of that speech. He didn't list problems, but rather, achievements. We don't consider that we have achieved a great deal on Mideast. From some points of view, people might argue that peace in the Middle East is further away than a year ago. From many points of view, M.E. is more dangerous than any other area.

It is difficult to conceive of anything we could do in Vietnam that could bring a general war. (then he qualified that somewhat)...But Mideast is like the Balkans in 1914...small countries with no overall concern about the ~~x~~ balance of peace in the world. Conflict could start, and spread, unrelated to big power interests. We have tried to separate U.S.-Sov. interests from individual countries' interests. We are just at the beginning of this process.

Q- Vietnamization prognosis? Negotiations?

A- Now having studies made. By mid-Feb. hope have conclusions. Our studies confirm, systematically, a considerable change in the countryside. Guerrillas have suffered considerable losses and govt. rule has expanded. But question is, How fragile is this gain? Can it erode under Arvin? I have no conclusive evidence yet on Arvin capability. There has not yet been significant NorViet offensive directed against Arvin to judge this. Maybe we are now being over-suspicious

But negotiations will succeed to the extent that we can pose to Hanoi an alternative that is worse than negotiations. We have a very severe and top opponent that has shown ability to assess the situation, quite candidly, better than we.

What is the worse alternative? The question for Hanoi is if Vietnamization works, that it will have to deal with Saigon, which can be worse than to deal with us.

Q- To what extent is U.S. policy contingent on Hanoi?

A- ...The demagogic answer is that it is not. But of course our policy is dependent to some extent on what Saigon and Hanoi do. Totally wrong to say not. Of course, if Hanoi poured everything in, this is a different situation....But if Hanoi loses the 'multiplier' effect of guerilla forces on the scene (and is forced to operate only with its own ~~own~~ troops) then we become independent of Saigon's actions. (This was a telescoped version of the contention that if Hanoi has only ~~own~~ conventional forces, they cannot stand against U.S. forces with superior firepower, mobility, etc.).

With Saigon we have a delicate problem. Saigon has done a great deal at U.S. suggestion. I can think of nothing we haven't done that we could have done without Saigon's veto. I can think of nothing in the peace negotiations that we wanted to do that Saigon vetoed... but the real test of this will come in negotiations.

Q-(A question about domestic impact on foreign problems).

A- I have next to nothing to do with domestic problems. My ~~an~~ impression is that the Pres. is giving increased attention to ~~his~~ domestic problems...The Pres. operates by getting a conceptual grasp on problems (first). On foreign policy now the main outlines are pretty well set--although we still have a lot to do...I have the idea that on domestic affairs he is doing the same thing. (conceptualizing first).

Q. Is gap between rich/poor, north/south, black/white your ~~problem~~ area?

A- Anything ~~with~~ outside the three-mile limit is my area and I fight jealously to protect it. (Chuckling); I am against the 12-mile limit.

I don't think north/south is right way to deal with the problem. The ~~Marx~~ Marshall Plan was carried out with industrialized nations...Nigeria has the problem of how to build a nation...On foreign aid, I agree that if it's not dead, its on a downhill slope.

Q- Assess press coverage of foreign policy.

A- (Says reads selectively) When I read papers I can usually tell who leaked what and for what purpose... Some of the participants in the (Nixon admin.) process have no idea what happened to their proposals (and often misconstrue, and pass on to the press, what actually ~~happened~~ happened)...Only five or six people really know what goes on...There is (news) distortion produced by the bureaucracy...Journalism's values were formed in an era when getting the news first was the most important thing. In my field there are very few newsbreaks

(newsbreaks) of that sort. There are few super-secret things that are worth knowing...On Vietnam, for example, if you study the situation, sometimes you can uncover things that are not generally known--sometimes, that the govt. has not seen...I'm more interested in someone's analysis of the underlying arguments, than the events.

Q- Is present transition in U.S. foreign policy v.unusual?

A- Whoever might be President would have been obliged to adjust to ~~x~~ events in which our influence declined...

Q.-Why Nixon so remote from us?

A- I never think of him as a remote president. The very factors that make ~~him~~ him remote from you make him close to his staff. The people who claim they really know the president are usually at the fringes. No president I ~~know~~ have known fully revealed himself to his advisers. I never thought that the Pres. Kennedy that Arthur Schlesinger knew was the same president that McGeorge Bundy knew...~~The~~ This president operates alone. He withdraws (in preparation) when he has to go public. The speeches he considers very important he will do with a very constricted group...He will sit for hours in an NSC meeting, taking copious notes and not giving a clue to his decision...He likes to go over choices and consequences, over and over again.

He doesn't feel the need for a lot of people to talk to...I could not get away with presenting to him only one course of action. It isn't true that he is insulated or remote--he is insulated from verbal contact, yes (but not cross-views)...

Q- Change in flow of information from Saigon to Wash.?

A- We have on NSC a group of people ~~assigned~~ assigned to play devil's advocate role...I think it is my job in large part to be a devil's advocate...We ~~k~~ now have 3 NSC staff people in S.Vietnam (checking)...I'm told that my predecessor, whom I very much liked, used to rely ~~on~~ very much on raw intelligence (I don't)...Lawrence Lynn now in Vietnam...Chairman of Vietnam special studies group; he has 8 people working with him; then we have a working group which I ~~chair~~ chair.

Q- U.S. foreign trade policy set?

A- We have not set the compass course on this issue as much as others...(but) we are basically committed to a liberal trade policy.

Q- What did Secy Rogers mean that Vietnamization is ~~irreversible~~ "irreversible."?

A- Vice President Agnew and Rogers, you note, both used term irreversible--but in opposite ways, ~~x~~ if I understood them correctly. The Vice President had just emerged from the President's office, so I would think he had reason to think he was reflecting the views of the President. Rogers said the present policy is "irreversible." What the Vice President was saying was that the rate and form of the withdrawal depended on the 3 criteria...I think the policies are basically consistent (as expressed by Rogers and Agnew; but Kissinger evidently regards the qualifications as more representative of Nixon's position.)

Q- Why is admin. so imprecise on timetable?

A- ...We need a measure of ambiguity.

QQ- Would reduction of U.S. forces in Europe harm attempts to relax tensions?

A- At some point over the next decade, some reassessment of the U.S. forces in Europe would be inescapable. I am not saying they (reassessments) are imminent; they are not...But the problem is that some changes are bound to occur, and the question is how it will be carried out.

Q- Chinese expansionism?

A- China is a fact of life; I think our attempt to establish contact will be one of the advances this admin. has made. It is not our intention to ~~xx~~ give Cst China carte blanche to expand. But it is also not our intention to assume responsibility for all of the areas around her periphery.

Q- SALT assessment?

A- The group in the Soviet Union which seeks a down payment of good faith (at the outset of negots.) seems less influential than in the U.S. Soviet intentions? They cannot build SS-9s until all eternity...They ~~make~~ may seek to put us in position where in crisis we have to face the choice of attacking population centers...If SS9s not accurate, they are less useful than single missiles; they don't need 3 warheads to attack a city. So deductive reasoning is that somewhere down the line the SS missiles are going to be accurate enough to attack Minuteman.

Q- By accurate enough, you mean a $\frac{1}{4}$ mile? A- Yes, on the order of $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile. If they continue build SS9s and SS11s at current rate, something has ~~to~~ got to give.. If they went ahead 5 years at the present ~~x~~ rate then we would have a problem...We don't have to make a deployment decision until we see how the SALT talks are going. We'll get a clue during the SALT talks, and we may get unilateral action (unexplained).

~~xx~~(Q. on Harvard student ferment. A- ...When a student says he wants to study 'what is relevant,' if he knew what is relevant, he wouldn't be a student.)

Q- See danger of Sino-Sov war? Preemptive attack?

A- A year ago I would have thought it inconceivable. Seven months ago, if you asked me if there was a war, who would it be started by, I would have thought ~~the~~ either(?)
(or Chinese?) ~~Chinese~~ (Now I can say)...If it happens, it will almost certainly--no, I think I can safely say, certainly--be started by the Soviet Union. My own view is that it is improbable, not impossible. Less than a 50-50 chance.



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