

United States Minutes of the First Meeting Between President Truman and Prime Minister Pleven, Cabinet Room of the White House, January 28, 1951, 2:30-5 p.m.

TOP SECRET

US MIN-1

U.S.-FRENCH WASHINGTON CONVERSATIONS

PARTICIPANTS

United States

The President
Secretary of State Acheson
Secretary of Defense Marshall
General Omar Bradley
Mr. W. Averell Harriman
Ambassador Philip C. Jessup
Ambassador David K. E. Bruce
Assistant Sec. of State Rusk
Mr. Thomas D. Cabot
Minister Donald R. Heath
Minister Charles E. Bohlen
Mr. James C. H. Bonbright

France

Prime Minister Pleven
General of the Armies Juin
Ambassador Henri Bonnet
Ambassador Alexandre Parodi
Ambassador Herve Alphan
Inspector Gen. Tezenas de Montcel
Colonel Allard
Jean Daridan
M. de Marranches

The President opened the meeting by welcoming the Prime Minister to the United States. He said that he was delighted that Mr. Pleven had come to visit us, particularly since the Prime Minister had lived for a time in Kansas City.

The President said that the first order of business would be the appointment of a group to draft the communiqués for the discussions. He suggested that the Prime Minister name a member of his group to work with Mr. Bohlen and Mr. Short who would represent the United States. Prime Minister Pleven named Mr. Parodi and Mr. Alphan as the French representatives.

The President suggested that it would be helpful to appoint an Economic Subcommittee which would report back to this group Tuesday afternoon. He said that Willard Thorp, Assistant Secretary of State, who had already called together a working group of American officials, would be the American representative on the subcommittee. The Prime Minister named Guindey and Alphan for the French side.

The President then said that the question for discussion this afternoon was our common policy in the Far East. And he asked whether the Prime Minister desired to speak on this subject.

Prime Minister Plevin expressed his appreciation of the welcome he had received in Washington and thanked the President for his kindness in agreeing to talk with him. He said that both chambers of his legislature had passed motions urging him to get in closer touch with the allies of France, especially the United States, for the purpose of arriving at a common policy on Asiatic questions.

The Prime Minister then reviewed briefly recent French history in Indochina. He said that the French had been there for 100 years but that during the past five years they had been having a very difficult time. He pointed out that the French had adopted a policy of complete emancipation of the three Indochinese countries and that this policy had been adopted without and mental reservations. They had been transferring power to local Indochinese authorities as fast as they could. This transfer could have been accomplished peacefully had it not been for the communist-directed revolutionary movement which had been fighting the French since 1946. He made it clear that this war was inspired by the men who now rule in China and Russia. He stressed the fact that the financial cost of this war was great and was constantly increasing. There were 162,000 soldiers in regular formations fighting in Indochina. Of this number, 60,000 men were from France and the balance largely from North Africa and Indochina. He stressed the high casualty rate in this fighting, citing as an example the recent loss of 8,000 men and officers. He pointed out that the war in Indochina was a real war against communist forces supplied with arms by China rather than military action against guerrillas. France had put at the service of the United Command in Korea fewer troops than it would have liked to have sent there because it was so heavily committed in Indochina.

President Truman interrupted to say that he understood the French position in this matter and appreciated what the French have done in providing forces for Korea.

Prime Minister Plevin said he would like to present information about present conditions in China which had been obtained from fully reliable French citizens recently expelled from China after long residence there. These reports indicated: (1) China has given up its initial goal of concentrating on the economic improvement of the country and is now devoting its energies to building up its military forces; (2) the Communists have been successful in concentrating all power into their hands; (3) the Communists have successfully captured the Nationalist movement in China; (4) guerrilla groups, whether loyal to Chiang Kai-shek or not, are not an effective military force and could not be so used; (5) the prestige of Chiang is completely gone; (6) the Chinese Communists are acting in accordance with advice given them by the USSR; (7) the military strength of Communist China is generally over-rated since there is relatively little economic power behind it; (8) no Chinese troops, including volunteers, are being sent to Indochina. Chinese help is limited to the supplying of arms and the training of Indochinese troops in China.

The Prime Minister said that the situation in Indochina could remain as it is, could be completely altered by the direct intervention of Chinese Communist troops, or could lead to some peaceful solution if the Chinese Communists so desired.

In regard to the first hypothesis, he said that the present situation was an improvement over that of a few months ago. He cited both moral and physical successes and noted that losses in men were large and were very difficult to replace. One way to do this would be to send more troops from France, more equipment, especially planes and to create additional Vietnamese troops. As regards arms, he said that French supplies were inadequate to meet either the needs of French troops in Indochina or the needs of the Vietnamese troops. The financial cost was very heavy and one-third of the present French military budget is now spent in the effort in Indochina. He said that France will be unable to pay for the maintenance of the Vietnamese troops. The question arises, he continued, as to whether additional troops should be sent from metropolitan France if, in five or six months from now, the French position in Indochina would still be about the same. The alternative would be to use these forces and funds to build up the French military position at home.

In regard to the second hypothesis, the Prime Minister said that there was a possibility of full scale Chinese intervention in Indochina involving Chinese divisions either from Korea or elsewhere. If this happened, the French would not have time to reinforce troops now in Indochina. In addition, even if this were possible, it would mean reducing French forces in Europe which would be a serious disadvantage. If withdrawal becomes necessary he asked the President what help the United States could give the French.

In regard to the third hypothesis, he said that the Chinese Communists could conceivably support a peaceful settlement or at least permit the situation in Indochina to calm down. In this connection, Korea and Indochina should not be considered separately but as a whole. The two questions were inseparable.

The Prime Minister said that the French did not want to settle the questions which he had discussed in his presentation without talking about them to the President. The French believe the US, UK and France should stand together and should make decisions covering the whole Pacific area rather than dealing with problems piece-meal as they arise. He proposed the creation of a consultative body which would act as an advisory group to the three governments on strategic, political and economic questions of the entire Asiatic area.

The President said that he would like to state the United States position regarding China. He said flatly that there was no present possibility of our recognizing the Peking regime whose officials had mistreated our representatives and confiscated our property in China. He added that we will continue to use every means at our command to keep the Peking regime from being seated in the United Nations as the representative of China. To do so would add only one more vote to the Russian bloc. He said that the United States will continue to urge the United Nations General Assembly to find that Communist China is engaged in aggression and that we will seek appropriate economic and perhaps political sanctions against it. He cited the resolutions approved by both the Senate and the House and referred to his press conference statement as indicating our firm policy on this question. He said that we cannot afford to allow a hostile power to hold Formosa. Since Formosa is the left flank of our Korean position, we are now insuring its military neutralization and will try to keep it out of Communist hands by providing military assistance to the Chinese Nationalists and continuing to have available United States air and naval forces for the defense of Formosa. The President said he had made this position clear to Mr. Attlee.

Secretary Acheson, at the request of the President, explained the basis for our position on China. He pointed out that the attack in Korea in June was aimed at shaking the confidence which was returning to the Far East. Prior to this attack progress was being made in Japan, South Korea was getting along towards stability, the French were making progress in Indochina and the situations in the Philippines, Southeast Asia, as well as Indonesia, were improving. The second aim of this attack was to shake confidence in the whole principle of collective security in the hope that the lack of confidence would affect the attempts in Europe to organize collective security.

The Secretary said that Chinese Communist intervention in Korea was aimed at preventing the success of the United Nations forces which were in a position to bring order to the largest part of that country. The President had decided to make this Chinese intervention as difficult as possible for the aggressors. He noted that the military operations in Korea are nothing that we or anyone else would seek but on the other hand we had no intention of being intimidated. We should not waiver nor be thrown off our course by proposals which Nehru has put up. We believe that if the only action which the United Nations could take was a face-saving device, then the position of the free world in Asia, especially in Japan, would be completely undermined. He said that several of the states in Asia would doubt the wisdom of throwing in their lot with us. The effect would be to lead these Asian states to arrange the quickest deal they could with the Communists. We must not sell out our entire position in Asia solely to end the fighting there. Our policy, he added, was to obtain a cease-fire, get the Communists out of the larger part of Korea and organize a state in the area which we control.

The President said that we are fully aware of the danger of permitting our entire military strength to be committed in Asia and that we do not intend to do this, He said we will continue to seek to confine hostilities to Korea but we do not feel we should run out and leave our allies and 200,000 loyal Koreans to be slaughtered.

General Bradley, on the invitation of the President, summarized the military situation in Korea. He briefly reviewed the military history since our forces landed in Korea citing the delayed action, the bridgehead, the break out by amphibious operations, the push north to the border, Chinese Communist intervention, the new line at the 38th parallel in December. He noted that one month elapsed before the Chinese attacked the 38th parallel line. He referred to the recent fall back to the second line which is below Seoul and indicated that this line prevented further attack on the west but did not completely stop infiltration in the mountainous area in the center. He said there were 467,000 Chinese and North Korean troops in identified units in Korea plus 625,000 Chinese troops just across the border. Current operations included an attack in the Seoul area against stiffening resistance. He pointed out that the air force was

working closely with the ground troops and inflicting very severe casualties on the Communist forces. He noted that the Communists have not attacked for over three weeks and attributed the slowness to follow up to: (1) weather—very cold and heavy snow; (2) supply difficulties—all bridges knocked out and kept by the Air Force in unusable condition plus length of supply line, 300 miles to Manchurian border; (3) severe losses from the first team troops; and (4) disease, even typhus. He said that the hesitation of the Communists to advance was due to military considerations rather than political considerations.

The President said that we were attempting to avoid bringing on World War III by seeking to confine the fighting to Korea but that if the Soviets threw in their air are free to act as we see fit to meet this threat. We have no intention of allowing our troops to be slaughtered by Communist bandits who are engaged in an unlawful war. The President added that we all appreciated the help of the valiant French troops fighting in Korea, especially at a time when France is so heavily engaged in Indochina.

Prime Minister Plevin said that the forces were small but they had good hearts.

The President said that was true but their presence made the force a United Nations force.

Secretary Marshall, at the invitation of the President, continued the discussion of our policy in Korea. He said that the United Nations military action had a great moral value but that it was an inconvenience to us insofar as it affected other things which we felt should be done. He explained by citing the Korean fighting as the reason why we could not build up our strength in Japan as we should do. This military weakness in Japan would be very dangerous if the USSR started a general war. He said that the United Nations forces in Korea had improved greatly and the Communists were suffering terrible losses. He described the current reconnaissances in force as an attempt to find out what is in front of us in Korea. In addition, for morale reasons, our troops must not remain idle. The present line in the west was chosen because of the many rice paddies now frozen which make it ideal tank and artillery country. He believed that the current Chinese Communist political actions arise out of our recent success on the battlefield in Korea. He noted that the South Koreans fight well but fight better against North Koreans than against Chinese troops.

Prime Minister Plevin expressed his appreciation for the military facts which had been presented. He said that sometimes policy was based on inadequate information and he thanked General Bradley for providing him with the Korean situation report. (The Prime Minister translated into French the highlights of this summary for the benefit of General Juin whose understanding of English is limited.)

The Prime Minister pointed out that there was a parallel between Korea and Indochina. The French did not wish to abandon the Indochinese just as we did not wish to abandon the Koreans. He noted that the Vietnamese troops fight ably and well against the Viet Minh troops.

The Prime Minister said that France did not reach a conclusion on Chinese Communist intentions as quickly as we did. However, he now had no doubt that the resolution we are supporting in the United Nations is the right thing to do because of its affection the morale as well as the physical situation throughout Asia. He said that like the United States, France did not want to stretch its forces so thin as to create a danger to the military situation in Europe. The only chance to defeat the Viet Minh is to build up active Indochinese forces.

The Prime Minister said that the French had received from the United States sufficient equipment for twelve Vietnamese battalions. However, thirty-three battalions have been recruited and there are no arms for these additional men. He pointed out that the new spirit in Indochina had resulted in many recruits of a type which could be trained as officers and that the French did not want to lose the impetus because of lack of equipment. The Prime Minister then asked when it would be possible to deliver arms for these soldiers and requested additional funds to pay for their equipment and maintenance.

The President said that in the fiscal year 1950-51 the United States had already approved a large military assistance program for Indochina. He said that our present planning is to continue this assistance and we envisage delivery in the future of larger quantities than we have so far delivered.

Mr. Cabot discussed the status of the arms assistance programs and elaborated on the equipment which we have on

order for delivery to Indochina.

Assistant Secretary Rusk, after pointing out that there would be a meeting of United States and French staff members on this question, said that we had three aims to achieve in the current military assistance program. One was to provide the material which would be needed to make successful the battle for Tonkin. The second would be to make possible the early replacement of Vietnam manpower. The third would be equipment necessary for an enlarged national Vietnamese army.

Minister Heath reminded Mr. Plevin that the French last October [For documentation on the U.S.-French Ministerial talks held in Washington, October, 1950, see *Foreign Relations*, 1950, Vol. III, pp. 1398 ff.] had not requested the United States to provide arms for native troops but that their new request included such assistance.

The Prime Minister said that they wanted as quickly as possible four divisions of local troops. The French had funds to equip 27 battalions but the speed of arming these battalions was so important that this program must be achieved even faster. He said that better air support for the troops in Indochina was necessary. He asked whether we could consider again the loan to the French of a United States aircraft carrier.

General Marshall replied that the United States Navy was very reluctant to release an aircraft carrier since it needed everything we have to carry out its task in Korea. In addition, General Marshall said that to provide an aircraft carrier to the French his Department would have to ask the permission of Congress and he did not know how this request would be received. The situation was not bright but his officers were looking into this request again with the view to trying to work out something.

General Marshall apologized for the delay in getting to Indochina the transport planes which we had promised to the French. He said their arrival was delayed solely because of transportation difficulties. He indicated that there was no prospect of our sending additional transport planes at the moment but that we were still looking at the whole problem of strengthening the entire position in Indochina. He said he was aware of the situation in Hanoi and was sympathetic to the field commanders who were so concerned at the length of time which elapsed between a decision here and the arrival of the supplies in the field

Prime Minister Plevin asked whether the French had a good chance of getting equipment for the four Vietnamese divisions.

Assistant Secretary Rusk said that to provide equipment for all of these divisions might require additional funds from Congress; further, that certain items might be physically unavailable. We would try to get a precise answer as soon as possible.

Prime Minister Plevin said that he was making this request because the French must be certain about their source of supplies for the next year or two or else they might be obligated to alter their present strategy.

The President said that Secretary Marshall would look into this situation and we will resurvey our program of arms assistance to see if the French request can be met.

Secretary Acheson asked whether the French would provide specific figures for discussion at the staff meeting on arms assistance tomorrow.

Secretary Marshall asked whether the French could use more profitably the aircraft carrier they now had if we lessened the restrictions which we had placed on its use. (This carrier originally limited to use in protection of lines of communication between Southern France and North Africa.) He indicated our willingness to do so. The Prime Minister said he would obtain the information to answer this question.

Prime Minister Plevin returned to his proposal to create a high level consultative body to advise on over-all strategy in Asia. He said that the United Kingdom High Commissioner MacDonald believed that if the French were pushed out of Tonkin the affect in Malaya and Indonesia would be very serious. It was necessary for the United States, United Kingdom and France to have this consultative body in order to facilitate coordinated action in the area.

The President said that we would consult on any subject that would contribute to peace in that part of the world.

The Prime Minister said that he had discussed his idea with the British who indicated that they approved it.

The President said that Secretary Acheson would discuss this with the Prime Minister but that he saw no reason why it could not be done.

Secretary Acheson referred to the French request for tripartite military conversations but noted that Mr. Plevin's proposal was a new and broader one.

The President said that the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense would discuss this proposal with him and that he would talk about it again with Mr. Plevin.

The Prime Minister then asked what aid we could give the French if the Chinese Communists attacked and the French were forced to evacuate Indochina.

The President said that we would help all we could and that we would discuss this question further.

Secretary Marshall indicated that the question of our help in an emergency was under discussion with the French.

The Prime Minister then returned again to his proposal for a new consultative body. He said that in Europe we had the standing group, and NATO, as well as meetings of the three Foreign Ministers. He said that Asia was so important to all of us that we must follow a common policy and that we need the new organization in order to arrive at the best policy.

The President said that we would discuss this subject and give an answer to Mr. Plevin.

Communiqué

At the close of this meeting, the Honorable Joseph Short, Secretary to the President, gave the following statement to the White House Press and Radio News Conference:

"The President and the Prime Minister of France had a comprehensive exchange of views on the situation in the Far East, with particular reference to the problems of Korea and Indochina. This review revealed a fundamental identity of policy between the Governments of France and the United States. The President and Prime Minister Plevin will turn to European questions tomorrow."