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Notes given Dr. Pogue by Dean Acheson

McGeorge Dean Paul Herbert Philip Acheson talks with Bundy, Rusk, Nitze, Feis, Jessup and perhaps others at Princeton Institute of Advanced International Studies July 23, 1957
(Summary only of conversation--this material to be used only with permission of Mr. Acheson)

Acheson cites an editorial from Commonweal of Aug 19, 1949 which asked why we deceived ourselves by promoting coalition between Communists and Nationalists; why not exert more pressure on China to clean up govt as pre-condition of aid; why didn't we earlier protest vigorously Russian violation of agreement at Yalta regarding Manchuria. Ed. says this shows some wrong thinking and ignorance as to what was happening in China and will take more than White paper to certify that mistakes were not comparable blunders. Acheson says that it is interesting that they are not objecting to Yalta so much as they are wondering why we didn't call Russian to book for not following Yalta agreement.

Someone said that Commonweal had been a little apart from others.

Acheson said yes. Says Commonweal had more restraint and was sensible and fair.

Formosa: It's one of those interesting situations in which hindsight doesn't do you any good because there's one important fact which you either know or you don't know which makes exactly 100 percent difference. What you do, and that is, the attack on Korea. If you do that why, of course, would not have taken the attitude which the government took on Formosa. If you didn't know it and had any reason that it was likely to occur then you just argue that the policy was right. The Formosa business goes back to the Fall of 1948 and the first of four or five requests from the Department and later from the Security Council were put up to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and that was for an appraisal by the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the importance of Formosa in that stage, and what we were ready and willing and what we could pay for preserving it, it was essential to do so. The Joint Chiefs of Staff throughout, as was made public through the Press, through leaks as you'll see in a little while, and then through the testimony of the MacArthur comm.--took the solid view, without any deviation whatever up until the 25th of June of 1950, that Formosa was of importance to keep it from falling into the hands of anyone hostile to the U. S., and that its importance was of negative sort, it was not important to us to have its use. It was important that it should not be used by a hostile power. The Joint Chiefs were absolutely clear that in the state of our forces, that there was not any possibility of our, their, being willing to recommend the use of any land, air or naval sources to prevent the fall upon that was never changed that was the basis of the --that was the military side of the diplomatic and civilian forces.

Q. To develop the possibility of wishing to retain the power and not being willing to make any military expend to keep it so.

Acheson That is correct. This was not expressed just once. I think there were give formal reviews by JCS. We continued to make reports that situation was getting worse in our judgment and

therefore did they have a different idea about it. This was reviewed continually in Sec Council after I came in the latter part of 1949. I think was in late summer or early fall of 1949 that I reported to Sec Council that we had exhausted all resources of diplo and econ or were exhausting them and would be if we continued to do what we were doing. And we had to report that they were insufficient to keep them from going to the Communists. There were Natl Intel surveys of Formosa which placed collapse of Formosa in late 1950.

That was sit in the fall when they asked for one more, not for one more, but for another review by JCS of Formosa paper. JCS came up with a paper in end of Dec 49 which repeated what they said before and then recommended that we send a mil mission of instructors and give some funds for mil equipment.

This was 7 mos before Korean War began--Sept 1949. Was discussed in State before it went to Natl. Sec Council and we took exception. We said certain clear factors. This island could not be held without US mil forces. Found we were unwilling from mil, pt of view and unable to furnish forces for that! And third we had mil Intel estimate that it couldn't last beyond 1950. We said it means putting US prestige in a hopeless task and we think that is foolish and unprofitable thing to do. Matter went to Natl Sec Council I think on morning on Dec 29. Rusk, Butterworth and I met with JCS. After that Rusk, Butterworth and I together. At 2:30 in afternoon, the Natl. EC Council met and Rusk and Butterworth went with me. We debated whether a mission should be sent to Formosa and whether funds for armaments would be--we would try to get funds and make them available. We made before the Press the view which I just expressed that I just thought it ought to be done, on no particular logical reason that I just thought it ought to be done. He was I think largely influenced by Louis Johnson and President decided he would not do it and that he would follow the advice of the State Dept in this regard. Now that was decided Dec 30, 1949. There was rumor on 29th that US is studying mil moves to hold Formosa and fleet being reinforced. Truman and top aides study Asia politics. Mac Arthur warns against letting Reds seize base. Jan 1st a Sunday, Jan 2d a holiday. Talks resume on Jan 3. On Jan 2d Taft and Hoover put out statements urging aid to Formosa by force if necessary. Made quite a sensation. On 4th there is report that W. Koo came in with request for mil equip and trig mission on Dec 23d--this had leaked out. On Dec 4 Vandenberg approves China policy fight. And then the statement that the go-ahead signal for a gloves-off attack on admin handling the for policy--rather the China policy.

Q. You have other evidence of that directive--Vandenberg coming around for permission?

Acheson: I don't recall. I know I've talked with him several times. I saw him on the 4th of Jan and he was very eager to convince himself that he had never agreed with anything that was done on China; he talked about it at length. I think very largely he was keeping up his own morale.

Prest gave State of Union speech to Congress on Jan 4. Afterwards I went to White House to see Prest on Formosa. We agreed it seemed sit was getting out of hand and all sorts of things were being leaked from Admin. I think from Sec of Defense (we didn't talk about this). And Formosa was becoming subject of partisan attack. I felt Prest should put his foot down and say this is what we are going to do. So together we drew up statement which he would give out on Jan 5. Prest undertook to do necessary consultation with Defense people-on drafting not policy

because he had decided policy on the 4th. I went out then to see Sen. Connolly and Judge Kee (House For Rels chmn) and explained why this was done and they made no objection. I then went to Wardman Park and talked with Vandenberg. He did not consent to regarding this as a consultation, and I didn't suggest that it was, but I thought it was proper to warn him so he wouldn't be taken by surprise.

Next day Prest put out his statement, but held it until morning before it was put out before checking with Defense. Slight mix-up. Was read to Gen Bradley who was concerned about statement that we had no interest in Formosa as a base. He said if we got into war we might need it as base and put in "at this time" at end of statement. However it had been given to Press without that and when it was recalled and this added, it had a tremendous effect. If it had been in at first I doubt if anyone would have noticed it. I told Adm Sells on morning of 5th that this was dangerous, but Bradley felt strongly and it was done. Near noon I saw Sens Knowland and Smith, but I am not sure if we talked about this. About 12:10 I saw Prest again and he said take it up with my press conference that afternoon and explain background.

At the press conf the reporters didn't ask the main questions on background; got off on other things.

On Jan 4th, Knowland burst out with revelation of guidance paper. On Dec 23 we had sent out a guidance paper to Voice of America people saying what sit was in Formosa. Was quite likely to fall and if it did they were to minimize the fall. Now this is the sort of thing that is hard to explain to a Methodist Sunday School. You are saying this may happen; put up brave front. It is bad to get into public debate about it. So it was annoying when Gen MacArthur's headquarters. May have been clerk's error, but there were a lot of clerk's errors coming out of Tokyo and we had a strong feeling it wasn't a clerk's error. Knowland tried to get original and we said no. Tried to get names of people who worker; on it and I took resp. and said no.

McGeorge Bundy explains about JCS. Johnson took firm position that budget not to go above \$13 billion. Bradley and others Chiefs were clear this was taking chances with security; then to take on another obligation which upsets all these dispositions was an awful hard thing for them to do.

Q-- I think you are right. The military will not say we can't hold Formosa unless they can say we have available this many divs, carriers, planes, etc. We haven't got to stuff to guarantee, so we can't hold Formosa or prevent it being taken over.

DA Rels very difficult between State and Defense because of personality of Johnson. Johnson got Gen Burns back from retirement and he insisted all State-defense rels had to go through him. I had to appt someone--Doc Matthews--to deal for us. Any other discussion in person which he heard of he raised t ell about. Remembers in March of 1950 when Russia exploded A. bomb Prest directed State and Defense to re-examine security. We went through Matthews and turns for jt session. Arranged for State Dept and papers given to Louis and me days before mtg. I presided. Paul started to present paper. Louis was leaning back in chair. He came down with crash and whacked table and blew up in most violent way and said things had to be done in a special way and no one had the right to make appointments for him except himself and neither Paul Nitze nor anybody else was going to order the Secy of Defense around and this mtg was

going to stop and his people were going home and they did. They left Gen Burns behind and he burst into tears Sauer told Prest. Prest called me and said it was outrageous and he wasn't going to stand for it; we were right. We had an awful row. Burns was going to resign. You couldn't do what we did when Gen Marshall was Sec of State. Then we went to offices of JCS and I think for first time in history of US, Sec of Defense, Dept secy, three or four people in Dept and all the JCS and assts sat around table. Gen Marshall meticulous.

All mil on one side and civilians on other; he sat with civilians. Then we really discussed things; not formal papers. We would argue about things and then sort of made a truce and would say we won't have a mil pt of view or a diplo pt of view. And that if I wanted to act like chief of staff that was all right. And it got so that Brad could be secretary of state if he wanted to and then mix up mil and pol as it had to be and see if we could get enlightenment on our common problems. That went on throughout Marshall's regime. We never had the same meetings with Lovett.

Q. No but you had continuing mtgs with JCS.

DA We had those with JCS and all through Lovett's admin there was perfect freedom and intercourse and communication back and forth. Quite often for lunch with Bob.

On Jan 11 Taft made speech which says in China State Dept has pursued policy diff from anywhere else in world. Not slightest doubt that if proper kind of sincere aid given to Nationalists, they could have stopped Communism in China. But State has been guided by left-wing gp which has been trying to get rid of Chiang and are willing at least to turn China over to Communists for that purpose. Have defied general policy laid down by Congress on China.

DA Jan 12 I spoke to press club on policy. Worked on speech several days. Two main ideas: (1) defense perimeter. By omitting Formosa and Korea people said I meant these would be given up. Maybe that was bad presentation but I was talking about something different, because I went on to speak about areas other than the ones I was talking about and I thought speech made it clear. I was saying this is the line which we can hold and will hold and cannot be pushed out of. I then went on to say if other areas attacked there was UN and collective security. Now maybe that was the wrong day to do it. I think much of the criticism was partisan rather than analytical. (2) I said there was a possibility of Titoism in China.

In March McCarthy starts his attack. (Some think it is Feb). Someone says McCarthy had some speeches to make and had nothing to say, so he got somebody at TIMES- HERALD to give him a canned speech and they gave him these numbers of risks. He originally said 205 and the fellow called him up and said that's 87. He scratched it out in his original ms and wrote it 57. I think original McCarthy attack came from no plot on his part but was just that a Times Herald ghost gave him this rather than something attack deep freezers or something. All snooping around we have done since confirms it.

Says Feb 10 TIMES (London) had editorial on US policy and said they were interested in moderation of our policy. Is an interesting question whether any Sec of State who concentrates on being popular in the US can really carry out for affairs of US.

DA Only thing I can recall is that under the mil establishment we then had and apparently were going to have for some time we had to accept the fact that Formosa was going to fall and that we had to live with that and that we could probably live with that, that we could probably adjust to it without too serious impairment of the national interest. Seemed to me to be a fact of life. Whether I should have accepted it or whether there were ways of changing our rate of progress on the mil estab I may have been at fault for not taking a more active part on that.

(Johnson still had the idea of potential political gains to be obtained from the man who got more defense for less. This doesn't refer to last statement directly but is interesting commentary).

Someone asks if we should have been more receptive to recog of Red China. DA says impossible because they were always arresting someone or the like. Says he thinks pro-Russians in China didn't want improved rels with US and China.