At 3:30 P.M., Tuesday, November 20, 1950, the President convened a special meeting of the National Security Council in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Those present at the meeting were as follows:

The President
K. Leverett Harriman, Special Assistant to the President
Sidney R. Symes, Special Consultant to the President
George H. Elsey, Administrative Assistant to the President

The Vice President
Dean Acheson, Secretary of State
Philip C. Jessup, Ambassador at Large
H. Freeman Matthews, Deputy Undersecretary of State
Dean Rusk, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs
Paul H. Nitze, Director, Policy Planning Staff

General George C. Marshall, Secretary of Defense
Robert A. Lovett, Deputy Secretary of Defense
Frank Pace, Jr., Secretary of the Army
Thomas E. Lipton, Secretary of the Air Force
Dan Kimball, Under Secretary of the Navy

General Omar Bradley, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
General J. Lawton Collins, Chief of Staff, U.S. Army
Admiral Forrest P. Sherman, Chief of Naval Operations
General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force

Stuart Symington, Chairman, National Security Resources Board
Robert Walley, Vice Chairman, National Security Resources Board

John E. Snyder, Secretary of the Treasury
James S. Lay, Executive Secretary, National Security Council

General W. F. Smith, Director, Central Intelligence Agency

The President asked General Bradley, who had set up a large map of Korea at one end of the room, to delay the military briefing until the cabinet convened at 4 P.M.

The President then asked the Secretary of State to open the discussion.
Mr. Acheson said that he had been on Capitol Hill all day, meeting with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the morning, and the House Foreign Affairs Committee in the afternoon, and that he was out of touch with the latest developments in Korea. He said that, if the President didn't mind, he would appreciate hearing General Bradley give a summary of the military situation.

The President then asked General Bradley to summarize the situation in Korea.

General Bradley spoke at some length, outlining the disposition of United Nations and enemy troops, explaining General MacArthur's offensive operations which began about a week ago, and stating that these operations had been cut short by the unexpected and unforeseen offensive of Chinese communist troops estimated at about 200,000.

General Bradley referred to a cablegram which had been received during the night from General MacArthur and which had been called to the President's attention at 6:15 A.M. this morning. (The Department of the Army incoming Top Secret cable .

General Bradley said the new developments and General MacArthur's cable raised two questions. The first of these was whether the Joint Chiefs of Staff should issue a new directive to General MacArthur.
General Bradley went on to answer the question by saying that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been in nearly continuous session throughout the day and it was their opinion that no new Directive should be issued for the time being, certainly not until the military situation clarifies. General Bradley said he felt that the reports which were coming in over the press and radio about the strength and momentum of the Chinese communist offensive might well be exaggerated. He rather doubted that our lines had been breached in the manner the newspapers were saying and he felt that it was entirely possible that the Chinese offensive might not go very far because of the extremely difficult terrain (which we would find advantageous from the defensive point of view) and because the Chinese communists had a difficult supply situation. General Bradley concluded this portion of his remarks by saying that the Joint Chiefs might feel it desirable to issue a new Directive in 48 or 72 hours.

General Bradley said the second question related to the great air potential of the Chinese communists. In his remarks on the ground situation, he did not mean to minimize the seriousness of the military situation. The Chinese communists have an air potential of at least 300 bombers on nearby fields in Manchuria. These bombers could seriously
curtail our air lift, and our planes were jammed so closely on the
fields in Korea that surprise raids could do us very great damage.
Despite these facts, General Bradley said that the Joint Chiefs of
Staff do not believe that General MacArthur should be authorized to
bomb airfields in Manchuria.

The President asked if there was any way to lessen the damage
which we might suffer from a future air attack by the Chinese com-

General Vandenberg said no there was not, short of moving many
of our planes back to Japan. This would, of course, mean a considerable
slowing up of our own military operations.

The President then asked General Marshall to speak.

General Marshall said that the Armed Forces Policy Council had
met in the morning, and that the three Service Secretaries had met
thereafter. General Marshall said that the results of the meetings
were admirably summarized in a memorandum prepared by the three Service
Secretaries and he asked the President's permission to read the
memorandum. (A copy of this memorandum is attached.)

After reading the memorandum, General Marshall said: "We talked
over what our immediate reaction in the way of positive action ought
to be. We must act on the assumption that United Nations forces can
hold a line. We feel that the second military supplemental budget estimate should go up at once. We will take the Budget Bureau cuts on bases, but we cannot take any cut in armament or personnel. We feel very strongly that the estimate has to go to Congress right away.

The General added that he knew the Department of State would go to work immediately on the Korean problem in the United Nations.

The President interrupted to say that he had already told the Budget Director (Mr. Fred Lawton) to prepare the Budget estimate right away and that, on the basis of his discussion with General Marshall at 12:30, he had told the Director what cuts could be made.

General Marshall resumed his discussion with the diplomatic aspects of Korea. He said he thought it essential for the United States to go along with the United Nations approach to the Korean question, even if going along with the United Nations meant some difficult problems for us. He said he felt it essential for us to keep a unanimity of approach in the UN. He said he would like to repeat again the point which the three Service Secretaries had regarded as the most important item in their memorandum, namely, not getting ourselves involved individually, or as a United Nations matter, in a general war with China.
He said he thought "off the cuff" that there wasn't any danger of the United Nations getting us into such a fix. General Marshall said he wanted to say, in conclusion, that we should start to work at once on further military estimates which could be submitted to the new Congress in January. He asked General Bradley if he had anything further to add.

General Bradley said that the Joint Chiefs of Staff would not recommend that any additional Reserve components be ordered up now. He said that there were no additional troops that could be sent to General MacArthur and that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not plan to try and send any others. He added that this decision might be changed, but he doubted it. The Joint Chiefs would like to see a bigger representation of troops of other United Nations forces fighting in Korea provided that they really could fight and that they would not prove to be too great a burden on us for supplies. General Bradley said that the Joint Chiefs felt just as strongly as the three Secretaries that we should not let ourselves be pulled into any war in China.

General Marshall said that he would like to add a few remarks to General Bradley's earlier description of the current military situation. He pointed out that our forces in northeastern Korea
were very scattered. There is a big gap in our lines and "I don't know what MacArthur intends to do about that," Marshall said. "It is his problem. I won't even ask MacArthur what he is going to do. We have no business, here in Washington, 8,000 miles away, asking the local Commander what his tactical plans are. General Collins here, and General Smith, know that all during the Battle of the Bulge the War Department did not ask them one single question. We let them do the fighting. It's the same way now. We must follow hour by hour any developments pertaining to our getting further involved with the Chinese communists but we won't ask MacArthur his tactical plans." Secretary Pace said that it was imperative that everyone in the room understand that we have only the 82nd Airborne Division available in this country and that we would not have any National Guard in combat form until March fifteenth.

General Marshall concurred with Mr. Pace but said that he felt if it really were urgent, the National Guard divisions could be ready by March first. That meant that the selectees would have had four months' training.

The Vice President interrupted the discussion at this point and asked the President if he might ask a question. Did General MacArthur make the statement attributed to him a week ago that the boys in Korea
would be home by Christmas? Did he know what was going on? If he
did know, why did he say it? How in the world could a man in his
position be guilty of such an indiscretion?

The President replied, "He made the statement; you will have to
draw your own conclusions as to why he did it."

The Vice President wondered how any man could have said that.
"I can't comprehend why the statement was made," he said.

Secretary Peace said he understands that MacArthur "officially"
denies the statement.

Deputy Secretary Lovett said he understands MacArthur says his
statement was "misinterpreted." However, Mr. Lovett continued, we have
a transcript of his press conference showing that he said it.

General Bradley said he had a personal theory about the state-
ment which might or might not be accurate. He feels that General Mac-
Arthur may have made it for the consumption of the Chinese communists,
to show them that we mean to get out of Korea as quickly as possible
and that we have no designs on Manchuria or on continuing the war.

Even if that is a correct interpretation, it was still a rash statement.

The Vice President remarked that General MacArthur ought to
realize that any statement of his would have American consumption
as well as Chinese consumption.
The President said that, no matter what we might think about MacArthur’s statement, we would have to be very careful "not to pull the rug out from under him." The President said we could not afford to damage MacArthur’s prestige at this point.

The Vice President persisted, with the opinion that "This is an incredible hoax." It gives rise to all sorts of speculation. "I am going to be asked," he said, "all kinds of questions about this on the Hill." He remarked that everybody present knew of his personal relations with General MacArthur and could understand why he was so concerned about this.

General Bradley said, "I think MacArthur had full confidence in his ability to get up there (to the Yalu River). His troop disposition shows he had no inking of all those Chinese communists facing the center of his line."

"Why," asked the Vice President, "didn’t he reconnoiter? Why didn’t he know the communists were there?"

General Marshall, in commenting on the MacArthur statement said, "We regard it as an embarrassment that we have to ride around in some manner. In support of what Bradley says, MacArthur thought he had only 100,000 Chinese communists to contend with."

The Vice President remarked that the picture drawn by the three Service Secretaries
indicated a tragic manpower shortage on our part. He was not at all sure that we would be able to hold out in Korea if we can't put any more men over there. How, he asked, could we have any confidence in MacArthur's estimate that there are 200,000 Chinese communists facing us now? A week ago he thought there were only 100,000. Maybe there aren't 200,000; maybe there are 100,000 facing us. We can't hold on if the Chinese communists go in for an all out offensive. "What do we do?" the Vice President concluded.

General Marshall said "I can't give an immediate answer. I will say that we can't get completely sewed up in Korea. We can't tie up everything we have there."

The Vice President wondered again what would happen if the Chinese communists came down in real force.

General Marshall asked General Bradley to read from the Joint Chiefs of Staff Directive of September 27 to General MacArthur which covered this point.

General Bradley did so.

General Collins said he wanted to point out that his earlier remarks were not intended to mean that we could not send any men to Korea before March first; he only meant to say that we could not possibly send any units out until March first. We could send replacements out
beginning January first but that would only be to meet losses.

General Marshall said that even these replacements would not help much because General MacArthur was already about 30 percent short of U.S. troops to give full strength to the United States in Korea. Many of the United States divisions had large numbers of Korean soldiers in them.

General Collins said he thought that MacArthur was short about 30,000 men. Some discussion ensued as to the actual number of troops now under MacArthur's command. No one seemed to have the exact figures.

General Collins said, despite the shortages, and unless the Tenth Corps really got cut off, General MacArthur could hold a line.

The President expressed confidence that General MacArthur could hold a line in Korea.

The conference then broke up into small discussion groups for a few moments. The President talked privately with Secretary Snyder.

The President then asked the Secretary of State for his views.

Mr. Acheson said that the events of the last few hours had moved us very much closer to a general war. There has always been some Chinese involvement in the fighting in Korea. First, the Chinese let the Koreans in Manchuria go back home to fight in Korea. Then they
Let a few "volunteers" go into Korea. Now there is a mass movement of Chinese forces into Korea. What has happened is that the cloak of Chinese neutrality has been lifted gradually, and we have an open, powerful offensive attack.

Mr. Acheson asked everyone to remember that the Soviet Union had always been behind every move. This meant that we must all think about what happens in Korea as a world matter. We must think about it all around the world at the same time because we face the Soviet Union around the world. Whatever we think of current happenings in Korea must be in the light of world events, and the three Secretaries and General Marshall were very wise in emphasizing the fact that we must not, under any circumstances, become involved in a general war with China.

As for the United Nations, we must go forward as said this morning, by branding the Chinese as aggressors. "I agree entirely," said Mr. Acheson, "that the Soviet Union is behind this but we shouldn't say so -- we shouldn't say so because we can't do anything about it now and to say that this is the Soviet Union and not to do anything about it would weaken us in world opinion." We couldn't make that position stick with some of the other countries in the United Nations, Mr. Acheson continued.
As for the Chinese communists, said Mr. Acheson, we must draw a line and not try to walk both sides of the street with the Chinese communists. There is no longer any question but what they are fighting us and it does no good to try and ignore this fact. We must stir up trouble for the Chinese communists any way we can but we mustn't think that the only way to go at it is by playing with Chiang.

We must make sure that General MacArthur understands his Directive, Mr. Acheson said. MacArthur may have spread his forces out in Korea, in such a way that he was very vulnerable to communist attack, because he thought his Directive required him to occupy all of Korea. Let's make sure that he doesn't keep his forces all over the country just because he thinks his Directive makes him do it.

Mr. Acheson said we must ask ourselves, what do we want in Korea?

The answer is easy, "We want to terminate it." We don't want to beat China in Korea, -- we can't. We don't want to beat China any place -- we can't. We must give most careful thought to the question of American air operations in Manchuria. If it is absolutely essential for the safety of the United States troops for us to bomb Chinese air bases in Manchuria that is one question, but we can't terminate anything by going into Manchuria on our own. If we got
into Manchuria and had any temporary degree of success in beating back the Chinese communists. "Russia would cheerfully get in it."

The more we put in, the more they would put in and they would enjoy doing it very much. We would just get into the bottomless pit if Chinese, Russian and American involvement. It would get us no place. It would bleed us dry.

"I don't know how to terminate it," continued Mr. Acheson, but we must first find one spot where we can hold. We must stay there. We must tell everybody we have done what the United Nations told us to do. Then, if there is any new attack, the whole United Nations and all our Allies must be told that this is a new Chinese aggression. We will then try to bring all possible pressure on the Chinese to find some kind of a political solution. This probably would mean contemplating some kind of a zone of neutrality.

Our great objective, Mr. Acheson said, must be to hold an area, to terminate the fighting, to turn over some area to the Republic of Korea, and to get out so that we can get ahead with building up our own strength, and building up the strength of Europe. We must remove French obstacles to the rearmament of Europe and we must go ahead as fast as we can.
Time is shorter than we thought, Mr. Johnson said. We used to think we could take our time up to 1952, but if we were right in that, the Russians wouldn’t be taking such terrible risks as they are now. What they are doing now means that we do not have as much time as we thought.

When the Secretary of State had finished, the President asked the Secretary of the Treasury if he had any comments.

Mr. Snyder assured the President that the Government was in good fiscal shape to meet any sudden emergencies of financing.

The President asked Mr. Harriman to speak.

Mr. Harriman said he thought that the mood of the free world at this moment was terribly important. He wished to recommend to the President that he take immediate leadership in this situation and that he see that the United States keeps its position of leadership in the United Nations. Bold acts of leadership on our part are all that can save us and we must not lose the initiative. He agreed with the others who had spoken that Europe is the most important area to concern ourselves with. He hoped that we could get a Supreme Commander “very fast.” We should forgo some of the details we have been insisting on and we should get a man over there in a hurry. The
attitude of the free world, and Soviet psychology at this moment, are both important to us and he knew the President recognized this. The article which the President had called to his attention in the morning New York Times was very relevant.

(The article Mr. Harrison referred to appeared on page 11 of the New York Times, Tuesday, November 26, 1957, and was a dispatch from Moscow entitled "Pravda Says U.S. Faces Deep Crisis.")

The President said, in following up Mr. Harrison's remark about public attitudes, that a few months back, in Key West, Florida, he had said at a press conference that the campaign of vilification and lies and distortion of the facts was the greatest asset that the Soviets had. He said he felt that Hearst and McCormick, and Roy Howard, had succeeded in doing exactly what the Kremlin wanted. They had divided our people and had shaken the confidence of the American people in their Government. This had to be overcome. If we face a fact and a condition," the President said, "we must meet it. I want to make a proper approach to this question. I thought of going up to Congress and addressing a special session on Thursday (November 30). Now, I don't think so. I don't want this country to make an individual approach to any of these matters of world importance, but I do say that we must
meet this campaign of vilification and lies head on."

The Vice President confirmed the President's remarks about the seriousness of the recent publicity campaign from some quarters. "It was the most diabolical thing I ever ran into." As the others in the room knew, the Vice President said he had been traveling all over the country. He found there was a real underground movement that had been put his finger on. "People you were trying to reach weren't there."

The minds of the American people were being poisoned by lies and rumors and untrue statements that caused them to worry and doubt their leadership. "I don't know the remedy, but it must be found."

The President said we were facing a situation at home like that in this country in 1850 (referring to the Know-Nothing movement). "It is not political — it is a question of national survival."

The Secretary of the Treasury referred to an article in the noon edition of the Washington Daily News, which was an example of a Scripps-Howard effort to create dissatisfaction with the Government.

Mr. Harrison addressed the President and said he was not sure that we could get back to unity without Presidential leadership, and the taking of firm position by the President on those all-important questions.
The President asked Mr. Symington if he wished to speak.

Mr. Symington said that he recalled a statement made in a recent National Security Council meeting to the effect that the United States was the last real force in the world that could oppose communism. He thought this was true, and he thought that for that reason the most important thing for us to do was to get out of Korea as fast as possible.

He said he had a second point, which was that labor and industry did not know how critical a spot we were in and that we ought to tell them and get them to work with the Government in building up our national strength as rapidly as possible.

The President asked General Smith if he cared to comment on the situation. General Smith said that he felt that the Chinese communists could keep us on the defensive in Korea but that they could not drive us out.

Secretary Pin letter wanted to point out that we have had a surprise on the ground and that we may well get a surprise in the air. We are vulnerable in the air and he would not make any attempt to hide that fact.

General Marshall concurred with Mr. Pin letter and he asked General Smith to read some recent Intelligence reports on the air build-up in Korea. General Smith did so.
The Vice President said he would like to follow up Mr. Symington's remark about getting out of Korea by asking what progress was being made toward devising a face-saving way for us to get out.

Mr. Asheson said "No deal is in the works." We do not have any plan at the moment for getting out that offers us much hope.

The President said that we might have to hold that line a long, long time and that we can't lose face by drawing out in a hurry. He said he was sure that Mr. Symington understood that.

The President turned to Under Secretary Kimball and Admiral Sherman and asked if either of them wished to speak for the Navy.

Admiral Sherman said he fully appreciated the remarks that had been made earlier about the undesirability of our becoming involved in a war in Manchuria but he wanted to point out that any mass attack from Manchurian bases would mean that we would have to strike back into Manchuria. He felt that we must face that fact. We can't, he said, just sit on the neck of Korea and take heavy air attacks from Manchuria. After all, it is only a short flying time and we can't stop attacks on us, if they come, just by doing the fighting over Korean soil. As for the Naval side of things, the Russians have 79 submarines in Far Eastern waters. So far as we know they are still
Russian but it would be an easy matter to turn them into Chinese subs.

After all, we turned 50 American Destroyers to British Destroyers in a hurry. The President asked Ambassador Jessup if he had any observations.

Mr. Jessup said he would like to point out that there was a strong possibility that the Indians might propose some kind of a peace movement in the United Nations. They might well come up with a "Cease Fire" resolution. This might not be bad provided their resolution did not also propose a "Stand Still." If it were just a "Cease Fire" it would give MacArthur a chance to get some of his troops out of untenable positions such as the northeast corner of Korea. If there were a "Stand Still" that would cause some problem. He wondered what the military attitude on this was. The President told him to take it up with the military directly.

The President asked Deputy Secretary Lovett to speak.

Mr. Lovett referred to NSC50, and wondered if it provided an adequate base for the 1952 budget. He suspected that the guide posts in NSC50 might not be adequate to meet the present situation. He feared that they might not provide for a fast enough build-up. We may need to expand a lot faster. We may have to "peak" our production,
and then cut back military production and procurement after we have achieved a satisfactory strength position. "Fasing" would be undesirable in many ways because it would cause much more strain on the civilian economy and on our manpower position, but it might now be necessary. Everybody would have to give serious thought to this.

The President agreed that that would have to be taken under consideration immediately.

The Vice President said that he thought we ought to speed up everything — both men and material. "Go ahead and ask for what you want" he told the President.

The President promised the Vice President that the military estimates would come up soon and that they would be big enough to shock the Vice President.

The Vice President said he was used to being shocked. He thought he could assure the President that he would get whatever he asked for from this session of the Congress.

The President remarked that it was now half past ten, and that he had to meet with the Cabinet.

Mr. Loy asked if the President wished to record any decisions from this meeting of the National Security Council.
The President replied that it had been a very satisfactory meeting but that there were no decisions. It was just a meeting at which everybody could exchange information and ideas.