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#146a notes	Notes from 12/5/67 - 6:02 p.m. Cambodia meeting [Sanitized NLJ 82-60] Top Secret 7 pp. <i>open 11-18-99 NLJ 97-259</i>	12/5/67	A

FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 1

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DECEMBER 5, 1967 - 6:02 p.m.

Meeting on Cambodia.

Sec. Rusk	Abe Fortas
Sec. McNamara	Walt Rostow
General Wheeler	George Christian
Director Helms	Tom Johnson
Clark Clifford	

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

December 8, 1967

1:30 p. m.

146

TOP SECRET

FOR THE PRESIDENT

Tom

FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of your meeting on Cambodia on December 5, 1967, in the Cabinet Room.

Those attending the meeting were:

Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
General Wheeler
CIA Director Helms
Mr. Clark Clifford
Justice Abe Fortas
Mr. Walt Rostow
Mr. George Christian
Mr. Tom Johnson.

The meeting began at 6:02 p. m. The meeting ended at 7:15 p. m.

Attachment.

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ADMINISTRATIVE MARKING;
BY DCH ON 12-11-81

SERVICE SET

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146a

NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING

WITH

SECRETARY RUSK
SECRETARY McNAMARA
GENERAL WHEELER
CIA DIRECTOR HELMS
CLARK CLIFFORD
ABE FORTAS
WALT ROSTOW
GEORGE CHRISTIAN
TOM JOHNSON

December 5, 1967
Cabinet Room

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6
NLJ 97-259
By is, NARA Date 11-1-99

Secretary Rusk traced the history of diplomatic relations with Cambodia, pointing out that formal diplomatic ties were broken in late 1964 - early 1965.

Walt Rostow said Sihanouk broke relations when it looked as though the U.S. would lose the war in South Vietnam.

Secretary Rusk said Cambodia is getting some Chinese aid. As of late, relations between the two countries have improved.

General Wheeler pointed to a map showing the area in which his intelligence shows there are 5,000 enemy troops. Included in this area are three infantry regiments, one division headquarters, and considerable supplies. "These are the troops who were defeated at Dakto. They are licking their wounds and getting re-equipped and having their manpower replenished.

The President asked how soon the decision is required.

General Wheeler said he believes the enemy will be in this area for the rest of this week -- possibly longer. He said he feels the enemy will come out of Cambodia and attack our men. He said the 304th division is moving down through Laos now.

The President asked if this operation would involve any invasion of men.

General Wheeler said no, that it would be limited to B-52 strikes along with tactical air.

The President asked how many enemy would be killed.

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General Wheeler said that General Westmoreland hopes for 10 percent casualties and very substantial damage to the logistical support. Based on the 5,000 troop figure, this would mean approximately 500 killed and damage to supply depots, and to troop housing.

The President asked how do we get intelligence indicating this concentration.

General Wheeler said the intelligence came from the following sources:

- radio detection
- informers
- intercepts
- reconnaissance photographs
- information of the residuals left over from the Dakto battle

The President asked for the size of the area.

General Wheeler said the area is 15 miles wide at its widest point.

The President asked would the operation leak out.

Both Secretary Rusk and General Wheeler said there was no question about it. There would be leaks from the South Vietnamese troops, and, of course, Hanoi would definitely announce it.

The President asked if General Wheeler was implying that there could be 25,000 North Vietnamese troops in the total area potentially surrounding about 5,000 U.S. troops.

General Wheeler said this was possible but not probable since the enemy would not take a chance of concentrating that many men.

The President asked how long can we let Sihanouk get away with giving the enemy this type of protection.

Secretary Rusk said we have tried all along to limit this war. "The action which General Westmoreland is proposing would be a significant act of war against Cambodia. This would change the entire character of the war. If Cambodia is attacked, they may ask the Chinese to side with them. Then we will really have a new war on our hands.

"If we take this action it would be absolutely essential to consult the Congress and our allies. I know that Australia and New Zealand would be against it although Thailand, Korea and the Phillipines would probably go along.

"If we could knock out 10 percent of this force why can't we do the same thing with the enemy divisions which we have clearly indicated in South Vietnam?

"It would be a major political burden for us to bear with a minimum military gain toward ending the war."

General Wheeler said the big difference between the enemy troops in South Vietnam and those in Cambodia is clear. He said that the enemy in South Vietnam digs in well, takes cover when B-52s approach and are constantly on alert, and they did not expect any attacks against them.

General Wheeler said there is no information about how many enemy have been killed by the B-52 strikes in South Vietnam but he has reason to believe there have been sizeable losses because of the B-52s.

The President said: "Aware as I am of the mistakes Generals have made in the past, I place great confidence in General Westmoreland. Both him and Ambassador Bunker have recommended this action. 12

We must tell Cambodia that we will not continue to permit them to house and protect these killers. Do we have to continue to live with this for the duration of the war?

Secretary Rusk said: "This problem is not really different from the one of mining Haiphong. We run the risk of enlarging the war."

The President said: "I see this differently from mining Haiphong or bombing the ports."

Secretary McNamara said: "This is analagous to a land invasion above the DMZ. This is not the most effective way to do it.

"This raises a basic issue of our policy, and I have thought that this would be the issue to face us in the coming year for sometime.

I believe, Mr. President, that it is most unwise to expand the war beyond the South Vietnamese borders. My arguments are as follows:

- This action would further divide this nation.
- This action would further increase our problems in the United Nations.

Because of these two points, I would strongly recommend against this proposal.

General Wheeler said: "I would not disagree with the importance Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara place on this issue. The real question we face is how long we can tolerate these people operating from a sanctuary. I take issue with Bob. Above the DMZ, we can bomb and use artillery against their positions. We cannot use our fire power in Cambodia.

"The Joint Chiefs do not want to widen the war either. We only wish Cambodia would be neutral -- honest to God neutral, too. Anyone else would not permit enemy troops to use their territory for sanctuaries."

Secretary Rusk: "I would have thought that Westy would have drug his shirt-tail along the Cambodian border and drawn the enemy fire. Then the rules would permit him to shoot back across the border when fired upon."

General Wheeler read a section of General Westmoreland's letter.

Secretary Rusk: "I also think that this action would make liars out of all of us who have been saying repeatedly that Bob McNamara's departure would have no effect on the conduct of the war. We have said his leaving does not mean any change. If we undertook this action, it would raise a credibility gap of proportions we could not stand."

Secretary McNamara: "As you know, Mr. President, I am opposed to this action, but if the decision were to hedge on what Dean has just said I would want you to go ahead and take it."

The President: "I have never thought that the departure of anybody would make us do or not do anything. I think all of us agree that we'll do all we can to win the war. We will do what we need to do."

Secretary McNamara: I am scared to death. I am scared of a policy based on an assumption that by going somewhere else we can war the war.

"The war cannot be won by killing North Vietnamese. It can only be won by protecting the South Vietnamese so they can build and develop economically for a future political contest with North Vietnam.

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Secretary Rusk: It may be that our main job is building a security in the center of the country. I have often wondered why we concentrate more on Conthien and along the borders.

General Wheeler said that Route 9 is the only route across the northern neck of Vietnam. He said moving back from Conthien would be giving up Route 9 to the enemy.

Secretary Rusk said he was surprised that Ambassador Bunker concurred with this recommendation.

The President asked General Wheeler why General Westmoreland did not take the advice Secretary Rusk suggested -- that is, to sweep down the border of Cambodia.

Secretary McNamara said that this action would not draw much fire. He said the North Vietnamese do not fire across the border.

Walt Rostow said in the rhythm of things it would take months rather than weeks to rebuild after a defeat such as the one they sustained. He said we do have some time on our hands.

General Wheeler said you cannot count on that.

Walt Rostow said the political significance of this act is so great that we must ask from military questions:

What is the quality of the targeting data?

What would be the pattern of the men during a 72-hour attack by air as proposed.

Rostow said the most important need is to make an issue of Sihanouk's neutrality.

The President said that the issue of neutrality being made a major question appeals most to him. He said he thought we should go back to Bunker and ask him to elaborate on the reasons why he agreed with General Westmoreland's recommendation. In addition, we should ask General Westmoreland to go into more detail about his recommendation -- particularly the question raised of enemy digging in as soon as the first bomb hits and scattering.

The President asked if all the Joint Chiefs agreed with this recommendation.

General Wheeler said that this recommendation is part of the four months' program for the conduct of the war and how to get it over quicker.

The President said we must let Sihanouk know we will not tolerate this action any longer.

The President also said he wanted Westmoreland to explore other means of getting at the enemy.

"I do not look forward to the day when somebody will say that General Westmoreland asked for this action and we refused it and then a lot of American boys were killed as a result. As I see it, this act could result in Cambodia declaring war against us and in their inviting the Chinese in.

Walt Rostow said he did not think Cambodia would bring the Chinese in.

Secretary McNamara said this is not an isolated action. It is a basic change of policy.

He said there is a lot that can be done short of a B-52 strike. While I recognize this is a good way to fight a conventional war, this is not a conventional war. It is unconventional, and we must use unconventional means.

Justice Fortas: Based on that which I have heard tonight, there is an overwhelming case against this action. The issue is the whole question of what you do about sanctuaries. It seems we should communicate with Sihanouk. Domestically, we should surface the use of Cambodia as a sanctuary. The sooner this is surfaced the better. The sooner the American people know about this the better.

The President asked what about another try at getting Ambassador Harriman to see Sihanouk. "We must protest this to the world."

Clark Clifford: General Westmoreland's recommendation does not make sense to me. You have a certain number of square miles in which 5,000 men are located. The General asked for a B-52 strike. The enemy are scattered all over the countryside when the first bomb hits the ground. I think it is more valuable to fly photo planes over the area, get good quality pictures, and have them reproduced and released. We need to build up a strong case to proceed to remove this sanctuary. I would be unalterably opposed to the action.

The President: Then we should go back to General Westmoreland and tell him we do not see the justification on an immediate decision on this. Ask for more details from him and also ask for more information from Bunker on why he supports this decision. Tell them all the reasons why we don't see this as a

good decision. In addition, we should point out to the Australians that the Cambodians are permitting the North Vietnamese to use this as a sanctuary. They should protest the action through their diplomatic mission in Cambodia.

We should ask Sihanouk to see Henry Cabot Lodge, Bill Bundy, or Averill Harriman. We also should get some pictures of what is happening there to show Sihanouk. I think we have been derelict in our duty in bringing this thing to a head. Let's give it top priority.

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