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#20a notes	Notes from 1/25/68 - 6:30 p.m. Pueblo 6 Senior Advisors meeting with McNamara, Rusk, Wheeler, Helms, etc. Top Secret 8 pp.	1/25/68	A

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FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 2

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PUEBLO VI

January 25, 1968
6:30 p.m.

Senior advisors

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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January 25, 1968
11:30 p. m.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of the Thursday night meeting on the Pueblo incident.

The following people were in attendance:

The President
Secretary McNamara
General Wheeler
CIA Director Helms
Under Secretary Katzenbach
Secretary Nitze
Clark Clifford
Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

The meeting began at 6:30 p. m. and ended at 7:45 p. m.

Attachment

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Meeting began: 6:30 p.m.

Meeting ended: 7:45 p.m.

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NOTES ON THE PRESIDENT'S THURSDAY NIGHT
MEETING ON THE PUEBLO INCIDENT

JANUARY 25, 1968

ATTENDING WERE THE FOLLOWING:

The President
Secretary McNamara
General Wheeler
CIA Director Helms
Under Secretary Katzenbach
Secretary Nitze
Clark Clifford
Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

The President: What recommendations do you have?

General Wheeler: We are looking at four or five military possibilities:

1. The placement of mines in the Wonsan Harbor. This would require substantial air action to handle the situation properly and require neutralization of air fields in the area. We would have to destroy the Wonsan military facilities. It is probable that we would require naval craft for support.
2. Mine other North Korean ports. We would select two or three important ports. The same problems requiring the need for air support would be present.
3. Interdict coastal shipping. For this we also need heavy air cover.
4. Strike any one of a list of targets in North Korea by air or by air and naval gun fire. Hopefully we will have better photographs of North Korea after a reconnaissance mission tonight.
5. Replace Pueblo with another ship protected by ample air and naval cover.

Anything else would require substantial military action.

The suggestion has been made that we seize North Korean ships. But

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they have no large ocean going craft. And we do not know where the four small vessels they have are located.

The President: What are we going to do with the aircraft that we plan to send to South Korea. Will they be there for purely defense purposes in case of further incidents?

General Wheeler: They would be there in the event that a decision was made to take reprisal action against North Korea in addition to their defensive value.

Secretary McNamara: If the North Koreans were to release the ship and or the crew in ten to twelve days the only thing we would have suffered would be humiliation. If we decide to replace the Pueblo with the U.S.S. Banner, we will need air support to protect it.

If we do not get the Pueblo back the President would want full air power there to take care of any massive response. In my judgment, mining would be the smallest increment of military action.

Under Secretary Katzenbach: We could keep their shipping and their patrol boats in the Wonsan Harbor.

Secretary McNamara: To do that we must have air cover and naval craft.

Under Secretary Katzenbach: The North Koreans have made gains right away. I believe they regard this action as a low risk effort. They have shown that they can do this. They may underestimate our difficulties elsewhere or place a high value on causing us more difficulties in this area. There is some indication this may be what they want to do. They are seeking to make life much more difficult for us.

There is no evidence (Richard Helms also confirmed this) that the North Koreans want to start another war.

They may be willing to return the crew and the ship. They may get something from the equipment aboard the ship.

But this still leaves us with the fact that they took a tug at Uncle Sam's beard and got away with it. I would put a high probability factor on their returning this ship.

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The President: Well, what do we do now?

Under Secretary Katzenbach: I would prefer to see the screw turned on North Korea.

In gradual steps we would move aircraft to South Korea. It makes good sense to move in the fighter bombers for the reasons Buzz (General Wheeler) has given, and also to show the North Koreans and the United Nations the seriousness of the situation.

I would send in a squadron of aircraft tomorrow. Then send in other planes on Saturday and more on Sunday. I do have a question about the B-52's. If you send the B-52's to the area without any public knowledge there is not much punch that this gives to the diplomatic effort. If we send the B-52's to the area with public knowledge that this is connected to Korea it may be too big. This may be too much. But you do increase the potential of the United Nations doing something by sending in the fighter bombers.

The President: What is the practical effect of this?

Under Secretary Katzenbach: I think that will get rid of the issue quicker. By moving the aircraft in gradually you will get more out of it than by doing it all at one time or by not doing it at all.

The President: The incident: Pueblo seizure, may be more than a pinprick. In my judgment this must be coordinated with what is happening in South Vietnam. (Stepped up attacks on U. S. units in Vietnam along with major North Vietnamese and Viet Cong build ups).

Secretary McNamara: I agree with that, although I have no real evidence of the connection.

I view this situation very seriously. The great danger that we must avoid is that the Soviets and the North Vietnamese will interpret something that we do as a sign of weakness. If we show weakness and are not firm, I think it will prolong the Vietnam war substantially.

Clark Clifford: I would like to view this matter differently. Let us assume for the moment that our only goal is to get the men and the ship back.

What would be the best way to achieve that end?

If we get the ship and the men back without taking substantial military action the President will get credit for restraint.

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We may have gotten a hair pulled from our beard. I would be ready to sacrifice that hair because our options are limited at this time.

We must be ready for the next try. We have very few alternatives at this point. So, again I ask what are the best ways to get the ship and the men back.

The President: I see little hope that the United Nations will yield anything productive. We do need to show that this is a very serious matter. We must show to the North Koreans and their brothers that they must avoid the confrontation. We need to show our plan in the United Nations and display some muscle to back up that plan.

Tommy Thompson (Ambassador to Moscow) said the Communist never react well to a show of force. That was not the lesson learned in the Middle East and in the Cuban Missile Crisis. We must not let them misjudge our strength so that they will be encouraged to do this type of thing again. Personally I would like to find some of their ships and do the same thing to them which they have done to us.

What about some other alternatives that we have not discussed such as the South Koreans taking offensive action across the DMZ. The North Koreans have been doing a lot of infiltrating and harrassment, so why not reciprocate?

General Wheeler: The ROK are eager to go into North Korea on hit and run raids like those taken into South Korea by the North Koreans. We have exercised great restraint on the South Koreans to the point where the South Koreans will no longer tell our American General the ROK plans.

Under Secretary Nitze: Mr. President, we discussed the fact that the Pueblo threw overboard classified equipment. Another alternative is for us to send a destroyer into the area where the gear was thrown overboard. The destroyer would have divers aboard to bring the gear up. This is completely legal and it is possible that the North Koreans would take action against this vessel. If they did we would be in a good position in the eyes of world opinion to retaliate.

We do not know if they are trying to recover that gear themselves.

The President: I thought we had an intercept that showed that they are trying to recover the material with divers. Isn't that true Walt?

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Walt Rostow: That is correct. We had an intercept today which indicated they are diving in the area.

Secretary Nitze: There will be an ox cart mission tonight which should give us some additional information about that.

Walt Rostow: Our alternatives are basically two:

1. Actions to get the ship back.
2. Actions to strike back in retaliation for this ship seizure.

We should search all photographs and look for their ships. Personally I would not be opposed to seizing a Korean ship flying a Polish flag. We should strain for ways to find their ships and determine operational methods to place mines without knocking out their airfields and other facilities used for defense. Of course we must be fully prepared for what counter actions the North Koreans might be prepared to take.

The President: Would you address yourself to the question presented by Clark Clifford: What will produce the ship.

Walt Rostow: A conviction by the North Koreans that they will run into more trouble than it is worth. That will produce the ship.

They think we are strained and tied down in Vietnam.

Therefore a measured show of force is appropriate. I feel we should put in additional air power for the following reasons:

A. We need increased air power in the Republic of Korea anyway. This incident dramatizes the deficiency of the aircraft in South Korea. It was surprising that we only had four planes there and that they were "out to lunch."

B. If this effort fails and we undertake to disgorge the ship, we still need heavy air cover.

The President: The only thing you know is to put more aircraft there. Is that the answer to Clark's question? Thompson says this will make them more entrenched.

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Under Secretary Katzenbach: What I believe Ambassador Thompson had in mind was that we should not say "hand over or else." They are tough little bastards. I do not think Tommy had in mind a series of steps to make North Korea know that we are about to do something and that we mean business.

I think a measured show of force supports our diplomatic efforts.

You can tell publicly --- I do not think it has been mentioned before --- that we are giving South Korea two Destroyers. You can move in the B-52's. In my judgment all of these actions support our diplomatic efforts.

We can start by saying that no North Korean shipping will come out of two or three harbors. By blocking them off, we take reversible steps. In other words these are steps that do not require that we take additional steps.

We should not let the North Koreans think that the Security Council is the way we have planned to deal with this. They must know we are prepared to take further actions, military ones if necessary.

The President: You and Bob McNamara work out a schedule of movements for the aircraft to South Korea. What do you say in answer to Clark Clifford's question. What do we do if this is our whole objective.

Secretary McNamara: We must protect ourselves from permitting the North Koreans and the North Vietnamese and the Soviets getting the belief that we are weak. I would go back to Kosygin. I think the Soviets knew of this or if they did not they have enough influence to shape the conduct of North Korea. I would not deal in a belligerent, public way, but I would show them that it is essential to give up the ship and the men.

Director Helms: What is wrong in telling the North Koreans they must get the ship to us by a certain date or face the consequences.

The President: The simple answer to that is that we do not want a war with the Chinese and the Soviets.

General Wheeler: Here is a proposed schedule for movement of tactical air. We are talking about an order of 8 days using forces in West Pac. In the first three days you would have 28 F 104's, 14 Reconnaissance aircraft and 28 F105's.

Two days later you would have the bulk of the U. S. Strike force. This would be 28 F 105's, 18 F 100's and 17 F4D's.

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After seven days you will have initial combat readiness.

Under Secretary Katzenbach: When will this become public knowledge?

General Wheeler: As soon as the units begin to move out. These things are very easily discernible from the movement of men and equipment.

The President: I do not see what is wrong with sending out the 28 fighters and the 14 reconnaissance planes now.

Under Secretary Katzenbach: I think that is fine.

Secretary McNamara: What you want is a series of movements. I do not think we need to make a decision tonight on this. I would recommend mid-day tomorrow.

The President: I do want to space this out (the movement of aircraft into South Korea) but I want President Park to know that we are going to do this.

Secretary McNamara: We can do this easily.

Clark Clifford: Mr. President, in a discussion we had yesterday at the Department of State I presented a view. Since you were not there I would like to give it here.

I do not think our case with reference to the ship is a strong one. The North Koreans have a better case on where the ship was. They were there. We weren't.

This was a "spy ship". There is a general feeling in the world that if you catch a spy you do him in. The North Koreans can say that we invaded their waters. We do not have a clear case to support. We must not issue an ultimatum. The odds are they would tell us to go sell our papers. Like blackmail, it is no good if you publicize it. It will become public knowledge we are sending in planes. The North Koreans have indicated something more may be coming. We do want to be prepared and ready for that. I recommend that we approach the Soviets again. I recommend that we go to the United Nations. I suggest that we start a quiet build up. We should send another message to Kosygin.

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The North Koreans may conclude they have gotten as much out of this incident as they can. Frankly I can stand a minor set back to our position rather than to take action which may lead us into another war. The capture of a spy ship is not worth us going to war.

The President: Okay, let's get a spaced-out movement.

Secretary McNamara: I will get the orders prepared tonight. We can issue them tomorrow at mid-day.

The President: I ask all present to assemble again at 11:00 a.m. on Friday.

Under Secretary Katzenbach: We went to the Red Cross and asked them for the release of the ship's crew and also for the return of the body of the dead sailor. I thought we should do this regardless of what other action we are taking.

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