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#34 notes	Notes from 1/30/68 - 1 p.m. Pueblo 11 Foreign Affairs luncheon with Rusk, McNamara, Clifford, Helms, etc. [Sanitized NLJ 83-13] <i>open NLS 92-142 10-5-99</i> Secret 8 pp.	1/30/68	A

FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 2

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1 p.m.

1957

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 30, 1968
10:30 p.m.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Tom
FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of the President's Foreign Affairs Luncheon of January 30, which was held in the Family Dining Room.

Those attending the meeting were:

Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
Clark Clifford
CIA Director Helms
Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

The meeting began at 1:00 p.m. and ended at 3:10 p.m.

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S FOREIGN
AFFAIRS LUNCHEON

January 30, 1968

THOSE ATTENDING THE MEETING WERE:

Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
Clark Clifford
CIA Director Helms
Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

Secretary Rusk: What was the President's reaction to the Leadership meeting this morning?

The President: I thought we did very little good, very little harm. General Brown was not a good briefer. He does not speak with authority. We need to take the toughest questions we get and answer them with authority with Senator Dirksen and Congressman Ford. We should say we have gone to the United Nations and to other nations with this matter and that we intend to go to Panmunjom. Military power will not get these men back, but we should list a few of the military alternatives to show them how unattractive they are.

Senator Edward Kennedy says the Vietnamese government steals about 50% of each dollar. He is about to release a report outlining corruption in Vietnam.

To what do you attribute the confession by Captain Bucher, General Wheeler?

General Wheeler: The North Koreans could have used drugs. They probably gave him something to copy and required him to write it out in his own hand. This may have been a deal to get the ship and the men released.

The President: What about the possibility of this Officer having turned?

Secretary McNamara: The possibilities are very small. We have made a thorough check of his background. There is very little instability in his background.

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General Wheeler: There is some worry at the United Nations that the Soviets are ready to surface portions of the ship's log showing it to be in territorial waters.

The President: Is it typical of the Soviets to be so firm on a thing such as this (Soviets have charged several times that the ship was inside territorial waters).

Secretary Rusk: The Soviets will say something knowing the facts to be to the contrary.

The President: I am jittery about the possibility of error. This Officer doesn't look like the normal, prudent, alert Officer I would have handle Air Force One if it were on alert. We must always bear in mind the possibility that we are in the wrong.

Clark Clifford: What is our position if we are wrong, Dean?

Secretary Rusk: If we are convinced we are wrong we would probably exchange a statement of regret.

The President: If we do not get the men back, what then?

Secretary Rusk: Even if the ship were to be found to have trespassed territorial waters, the North Koreans still had no right to do what they did.

The President: Where are we diplomatically?

Secretary Rusk: North Korea has accepted in writing our message. No date has been set for a meeting. North Korea has made no public statements on this, which is encouraging.

We do not know what will happen at Panmunjom. At the United Nations Ralph Bunche asked Ambassador Goldberg for permission to use the good offices of the Secretary General to send a Rumanian to North Korea. We advised Bunche that this did not bother us in principle. The Soviets may turn us down. The North Koreans said it was not the United Nation's business.

Gromyko has asked for a gesture to reduce pressure and the challenge. He suggested that we might want to send the Enterprise southward. I do not really see where this would accomplish much.

Secretary McNamara: The Joint Chiefs would want to leave the Enterprise on station. The Air Force is now working on a plan to expand the land-based air power.

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Walt Rostow: We may want to tell the Soviets we beefed up air power in the South not only because of the Pueblo incident but because of increased infiltration and the attack on Blue House. We could tell the Soviets that since they have a security pact with the North Koreans they may want to interest themselves more in this matter.

General Wheeler: (Talking to Walt Rostow). Somebody should talk with Drew Pearson about that article he had.

Walt Rostow: (To General Wheeler). Nobody is advising the President, to my knowledge who has been trigger-happy.

General Wheeler: Personally, I find none of the military courses of action particularly attractive.

Walt Rostow: We first had a message from the Soviets out of New Delhi that we should pretend that we had violated territorial waters.

Clark Clifford: What if we say the ship strayed by accident into territorial waters?

Secretary Rusk: We must look to the best facts of this matter. Even if the ship were in territorial waters it was not proper to seize it.

CIA Director Helms: Throughout the history of Soviet law, their interpretation of what is espionage is considerably different from our own. In Soviet law, walking down a particular street or looking at a certain installation is espionage per se.

The President: What about BUTTERCUP?

Secretary Rusk: The last BUTTERCUP messenger turned around because of particularly heavy activity around Hanoi. On his last report the message was not very clear. Ambassador Bunker wants it authenticated. Their people think we should release four additional prisoners. I think we should leave the details of this with Ambassador Bunker to work out with Thieu.

The President: What about PACKERS?

Secretary Rusk: Our man is expected in Bucharest on February 1. I think Hanoi is waiting to see how they come out in this offensive.

The President: General Wheeler, will you give us the most up to date information about Khesanh.

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General Wheeler: First reports indicate 700 enemy killed. U. S. and Vietnamese casualties are light. There have been rockets and mortars to hit Da Nang. The city of Da Nang was also attacked. Pleiku was attacked by a couple of hundred men. They terrorized the city and struck at the Pleiku air base. There have been at least two other acts, one against the 4th Infantry and one at Nha Trong and Kontum.

At Khesanh the situation is quiet and the weather is good. At 9:00 a.m. today EST General Westmoreland said that he had talked with his Commander at Khesanh and the situation is well in hand. At TET it is customary for many people from the countryside to come into town. It is easy for the Viet Cong to infiltrate these groups. They can bring in a mortar and a rocket easily. They assemble it at a prearranged time and attack these installations. We caught four trying to blow up a bridge. The enemy has lost quite heavily. The 4th Infantry captured 200 Viet Cong, most of whom were Montagnard Tribesmen. Twenty of them had North Vietnamese money.

Secretary McNamara: There are three military actions we would like to bring up at this time. Two of them will require the President's approval, and one is for the President's information.

General Wheeler: We would like approval of the Talos anti-aircraft missile for use south of the 20 degree south latitude. We have noticed recently that the MIG's are carrying wing tanks which give them greater range. They will be going after the B-52's in South Vietnam. They have been trying to shoot down a B-52 for psychological purposes for some time. (The President approved this action upon the recommendation of General Wheeler, Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara.)

The second item on which the President's approval is requested is the use of patrols in the DMZ. These patrols would be used to check on the disposition of supplies, troops and other developments inside the DMZ. Intelligence indicates a thickening of forces around Khesanh with a thinning in the Eastern end of the CMZ. As an alternative to use of U. S. patrols, we would suggest use of ARVN patrols with U. S. advisers.

Secretary Rusk: We will lose some men this way, but there is no political problem.

Secretary McNamara: I have no problem because of the Khesanh build-up. It is natural that we will want to know what is going on in the DMZ, particularly with Khesanh shaping up the way it is.

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Secretary McNamara: The third action we proposed is to organize and mount a feint of a full scale landing above the DMZ. This would involve mounting naval gun fire, making air strikes along the coast and moving amphibious shipping north into the area.

The President: Is this about the same as the proposal I have heard once before?

General Wheeler: Yes, sir. There are some disadvantages. If we made such a feint, North Vietnam would claim a victory, but we request the President's approval to go ahead and prepare a plan. This plan would be submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and to the President for approval. We would pretend we were going to make a landing and we would let it leak to the South Vietnamese to make sure that the North Vietnamese would learn of it. We would use naval gunfire and martial the shipping as though we were going to load troops. The objective of this would be to make them believe that we were about to have a major landing. This would, if its purpose is realized, get them to move troops and lessen the pressure in the Khesanh area.

One advantage of this is that if it does break publicly, we have never made such a move.

Secretary McNamara: We would plan this on the basis that it would be brought to the attention of the North Vietnamese and not to the American public.

CIA Director Helms: It is a great thing if you can keep it out of the hands of the press.

Secretary McNamara: I agree.

Walt Rostow: I would not leak it to the ARVN. Once you do it will become known to the press. I would make the cover through the use of the most sophisticated electronic equipment we have.

Clark Clifford: Here is my uninformed reaction. If we go ahead and plan on this and it should become know, people would say we used this as an excuse for the real thing.

The President: Go ahead and plan it. I want to give weight to the Field Commanders recommendation in this case.

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Secretary McNamara: The independent panel will meet this Thursday, Friday and Saturday to review the Pueblo situation. George Ball will chair it. Admiral McDonald and General Mark Clark will meet as the other two members. Paul Nitze will coordinate it.

General Wheeler: General Clark is a hardliner whom you can count on.

The President: Should we have Senator Stennis and Congressman Rivers down for a briefing?

Secretary McNamara: Yes I believe this would be useful. I would also have Congressman Bates and Senator Margaret Chase Smith.

Director Helms: Congressman Rivers is more antagonistic than anyone.

Secretary Rusk: Who was on the Bay of Pigs investigation?

Secretary McNamara: General Taylor, Bobby Kennedy, and Allen Dulles.

Walt Rostow: What are we going to do about Ted Kennedy's report?

Secretary Rusk: He has used figures we cannot legitimately attack. Corruption is a tough one to deal with.

Secretary McNamara: There is no excuse for the Vietnamese not lowering their draft age to below 20.

The President: We should sit down with these people who have been to Vietnam and talk to them before they are turned loose on an unsuspecting public.

(At 2:35 Walt Rostow returned from a call he had taken from Bromley Smith. He reported to the meeting that "we have just been informed we are being heavily mortared in Saigon. The Presidential Palace, our BOQ's, the Embassy and the city itself have been hit. This flash was just received from the NMCC.")

The President: This could be very bad.

Secretary Rusk: Yes, I hope it is not Ambassador Bunker's residence.

The President: What can we do to shake them from this?

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This looks like where we came in. Remember it was at Pleiku that they hit our barracks and that we began to strike them in the north.

What comes to mind in the way of retaliation.

General Wheeler: It was the same type of thing before. You will remember that during the inauguration that the MACV headquarters was hit. In a city like Saigon people can infiltrate easily. They carry in rounds of ammunition and mortars. They fire and run.

It is impossible to stop this in its entirety. This is about as tough to stop as it is to protect against an individual mugging in Washington, D. C.

We have got to pacify all of this area and get rid of the Viet Cong infrastructure.

They are making a major effort to mount a series of these actions to make a big splurge at TET.

Secretary McNamara: I have two recommendations. This is a public relations problem not a military one. We need to keep General Wan. in charge of the Saigon police. He should not be removed as some of our people in the State Department are suggesting. At least not until we find somebody better.

CIA Director Helms: I agree completely.

Secretary McNamara: He is the best security chief since Diem's time. He has cleaned up Saigon well.

Secretary Rusk: He is a good police chief, but he has been rather uncooperative with some of our people.

Secretary McNamara: The answer to the mortar attacks is success at Khesanh. We must get our story across. Phil Goulding called General Sidle this morning in Saigon. We are inflicting very heavy casualties on the enemy and we are not unprepared for the encounter.

Walt Rostow: Evron called me about the Suez Canal problem. This matter should be raised today. Evron said a crisis might arise out of the manner in which General Bull has slid from his position

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of clearing the southern end of the Canal to the north.

Israel feels this requires an agreement of both parties.

The Israelis want our support.

The President: What is our position?

Secretary Rusk: At the present, we need the consent of both sides.

Secretary McNamara: I agree.

General Wheeler: I agree.

The President: Then we should put pressure on the Egyptians to do this.

Secretary Rusk: I would suggest that we leave it in the United Nations machinery. If Evron's account is correct it will be harder to get a U.N. agreement later. We need to put on the pressure.

The President: Dean (Secretary Rusk) you talk to Goldberg to put the pressure on this.

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