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| #44a notes | <p><i>open 3/4/02 NLJ/RAC 99-242</i></p> <p>Notes from 2/6/68 - 10:30 a.m. meeting with Senior Foreign Policy Advisors [Sanitized, NSC letter 8/12/80] Top Secret 3 pp.</p> | 2/6/68 | A |

FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 2

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FEBRUARY 6, 1968- 10:30 a.m.

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SENIOR FOREIGN POLICY ADVISERS

Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
General Wheeler
Clark Clifford

Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 6, 1968
8:00 p.m.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

^{Tom}
FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are notes of the President's meeting with Senior Foreign Policy Advisers. The meeting began at 10:31 a.m. and ended at 11:55 a.m.

Those attending the meeting were:

The President
Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
General Wheeler
Clark Clifford
Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

The meeting was held in the Cabinet Room.

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
WITH SENIOR FOREIGN POLICY ADVISERS

FEBRUARY 6, 1968

THOSE ATTENDING WERE:

Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
General Wheeler
Clark Clifford
Walt Rostow
George Christian
Tom Johnson

There was a general discussion of the proposed speech to be given by the President on the Pueblo and Vietnam developments.

Secretary Rusk: Some parts of the speech are unnecessary. I do not think it should be given at this time. Extending tours of duty in Vietnam could have a serious effect on the morale of the men.

General Wheeler: I agree with the consensus here. I think this speech should be made when events are clearer in Vietnam and Korea. I would counsel against public announcement of a decision to extend tours of duty in Vietnam. It would alarm the American people rather than reassure them.

The President: We must lay out this situation in a clear logical explanation of what happened. I do accept your advice that it would be ill advised for the President to do this now.

The President then asked Tom Johnson to read the four points of criticism by Senator Robert Byrd (West Virginia). The four items follow:

1. Poor intelligence.
2. Poor preparations for these recent attacks.
3. Underestimated Viet Cong morale and vitality.
4. Overestimated support of South Vietnamese people and army.

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5

NSC Memo. 1/60/68 State Dept. Guidelines

By jc, NARA, Date 2-19-02
OSD guidelines; NSC letter 8-12-80

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The President said he was alarmed at this and that the attitude expressed by Senator Byrd seemed to be reflected by much of the comment heard in Washington not only by politicians but by the press.

George Christian: The story circulating now is that we must have a confrontation with the South Vietnamese government to get them to do more.

Walt Rostow: We have more evidence now than ever before about South Vietnam's role in this recent series of attacks. The government was cool. It never broke down. The Vietnamese military took the brunt of the attacks. General Abrams gives them very high marks.

The President: We should get to the Members of Congress information about all of this so that when they return to their homes they know what line to follow.

I want to send South Korea what they need. I am afraid that many people now are working towards the objective of undermining support and destroying our relationship with the South Vietnamese and with the South Koreans, and with many people in this country. There seems to be a great effort to discredit this government and its military establishment. Only yesterday I told Mr. Henry Brandon of the London Daily Telegram that I fully support General Westmoreland and that any talk of his removal is absolutely untrue. I took a bit of the steam out of him by showing him an "Eyes Only" cable to General Westmoreland expressing my full support for him and his actions.

General Wheeler: I talked with General Westmoreland this morning and he said he was deeply appreciative of the message from the President. He said that General Abrams would appear before the Press Corps to outline how pleased he has been with the performance of the South Vietnamese Army.

The President: Let's get off a letter to President Park. We should tell him we will take whatever action is necessary to support him and his government.

What is your evaluation of the Soviets moving those ships into the area last night?

Secretary Rusk: I do not think much of it.

General Wheeler: They are 160 miles from the Port of Won San. Our

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task force will be about 12 hours steaming time from its original position. We could take care of those destroyers easily.

Secretary McNamara: I am very disturbed about what the President said about the leadership, particularly Senator Byrd. He treated Buzz rather badly in testimony this week.

The President: This is all part of a political offensive. They say we had the people believing we were doing very well in Vietnam when we actually were not.

General Wheeler: This reminds me of the time of the Battle of the Bulge. The Germans did achieve tactical surprise both in method and in their timing. They stretched the Seventh Army out like an accordion. The Germans did much like the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese, even to wearing United States uniforms. I never heard at that time anybody who wanted to fire General Eisenhower because of bad intelligence. It was a severe defeat for at least one unit -- the Army 99th Infantry Division. Having been there, I do know that we lost some of our heavy artillery -- 15 of our 18 guns. We have had nothing like that during this current battle.

General Westmoreland was aware and concerned about these attacks. He had the highest possible state of alert. Had he not done this, the situation would have been much worse.

We cannot have the precise plans of the enemy without some amazing stroke of luck.

Frankly Senator Byrd surprises me on the Khe Sanh. I gave him the best response I could. I tried to put the military victory in context.

The President: I told him he should be defending us rather than attacking us. I disagreed with all points that were made. I say this to let you know what is going on.

Walt Rostow: If the war goes well, the American people are with us. If the war goes badly they are against us. The only way for us to answer this is for the military situation out there to come out alright. I think the men in uniform now have the burden in determining how much support or lack of support we get.