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#51a notes	Notes from 2/9/68 - 10:15 p.m. Senior Foreign Policy Advisors meeting [Sanitized State letter 3/13/79, NSC letter 3/27/80] <i>open 2-9-00 NLS 99-298</i> <del>Top Secret</del> 5 pp.	2/9/68	A

## FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 2

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FEBRUARY 9, 1968 - 10:15 a.m.

50

SENIOR FOREIGN POLICY ADVISERS

Secretary Rusk  
Secretary McNamara  
Clark Clifford  
Harry McPherson  
Walt Rostow  
George Christian  
Tom Johnson

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 9, 1968  
3:30 p.m.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Tom

FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of the President's meeting with the Senior Foreign Policy Advisers in the Cabinet Room on February 9. The meeting began at 10:15 a.m. and ended at 11:01.

Those attending the meeting were:

The President  
Secretary Rusk  
Secretary McNamara  
Clark Clifford  
Harry McPherson  
Walt Rostow  
George Christian  
Tom Johnson

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

FEBRUARY 9, 1968

THOSE ATTENDING THE MEETING WERE:

The President  
Secretary Rusk  
Secretary McNamara  
Clark Clifford  
Harry McPherson  
Walt Rostow  
George Christian  
Tom Johnson

Walt Rostow: Mr. President, we met this morning in Harry McPherson's office along with Secretary Katzenbach, Clark Clifford, Harry McPherson and I. These are the options which we have developed:

1. Reply to Fulbright by letter now, making the case that an open meeting with the committee now is not in the national interest.
2. Reply to Fulbright by letter now, saying simply that "I have read Secretary Rusk's letter of last December, and agree with it."
3. Telephone Fulbright and tell him "I am not going to order Secretary Rusk to go before the Committee in an open hearing."
4. Telephone Fulbright and invite him, along with his Committee, to the White House for a dinner meeting at which this and other matters will be discussed.
5. Have Secretary Rusk go before the Committee in open session.
6. Have Secretary Rusk offer to present his annual review of foreign policy in open session; this would include, but not be limited to, Vietnam.
7. Have Secretary Rusk offer to appear in executive session first; then to discuss Vietnam or other matters in open session if Committee members still want to.

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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6

NLJ 99-298

By is, NARA Date 1-31-00

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Secretary Rusk: There should be a key paragraph in a letter to Senator Fulbright. It should say that the Secretary of State expects to appear before the Committee in public session on foreign aid. The Secretary will not appear on diplomatic and military matters in public.

Secretary McNamara: I agree with Dean.

The President: We should deal with this as privately as possible. Attention and recognition is what he wants.

I think we should say that we have received the Senator's letter. This is a matter that the President is willing to go into with you and your Committee and then ask the Committee to the White House and talk about it. I will tell them that we do not want to make an issue on television, that we are willing to give them all the facts, but not make a television show of it.

Secretary Rusk: That is okay with me. I do think there is a problem of having a full meeting of the Committee with the President without my presence. If you get them down here four or five at a time, that is okay.

The President: I would feel better if you were here anyway.

Clark Clifford: The times are too serious and the public too concerned for a public feud between the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Secretary of State. I think the people are hopeful that we would be working together at times like these. I think it unwise to write a formal letter turning this down. A public session would be a disservice to the country. We should quieten the whole matter down. The Committee wants either a Roman Holiday with Dean Rusk or a confrontation with the President. There is no Constitutional requirement for the President to respond to this letter. I don't think we should get on the same level with them. I think we should invite them to a dinner. I think Dean Rusk should be there. The basic fallacy of Fulbright's posture would come into view.

There are some wavering men on the Committee. I would have the whole membership of the Committee, not just Democrats.

Secretary Rusk: This is fine. The basic motivation of the Committee is for free television time to air their views on the Secretary of State.

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The President: We might precede this with a meeting here of the Appropriations Committee. I do not think we should give any special attention to the Committee who is the most hostile.

Secretary Rusk: I would have a leisurely visit with them. Let them have their say then tell them how you feel.

The President: Fulbright has an obsession on Vietnam. I do not look for much to come from this.

Secretary McNamara: If this Committee is invited to the White House, other Committees should be invited. The House Foreign Affairs Committee certainly should be included.

The President: Well, it looks as if all of you have counseled, advised, consulted and then -- as usual -- placed the monkey on my back again. I will take this matter up with Mansfield and meet with the Committees if he believes this is wise.

I do not like what I am smelling from these cables from Vietnam and my discussions with outside advisers. We know the enemy is likely to hit the cities again. They will likely have another big attack and there undoubtedly will be surprises. I want you to lay out for me what we should do in the minimum time to meet a crisis request from Vietnam if one comes.

Let's assume we have to have more troops. I think we should now tell the allies that we could lose Southeast Asia without their help. The first to tell is Park. Tell him that none of us want defeat. If it takes more men to avoid defeat let's get them. Wilson implied that Prime Minister Gorton of Australia is singing a different tune from Holt. Is that true?

Secretary Rusk: He has said that he would send no more troops, but his speeches are alright. I will check this with Ambassador Waller.

The President: Let's talk to our allies.

If we have to move quickly I want to be ready.

If we have to call up more troops let's make the preparations now so that we do not have to do it in the middle of the night. What do we do first?

Would we send the 82nd Airborne and extend enlistments? I guess if we did that we would have to call more reserves to build up our strategic forces here at home.

Secretary McNamara: I agree that we should look at this situation and prepare for any contingency. I think that we should ask the Joint Chiefs to wipe the floor of all pet projects and do whatever we can to prevent the financial requirements from ruining us in foreign exchange in our domestic economic situation.

Secretary Rusk: There is one type of unit we are not using. This is the armored division. Would it be militarily advisable to deploy an armored unit?

The President: What about our summer situation if we move the 82nd Airborne to Vietnam.

Secretary McNamara: This worries me. This means we would have to call up a National Guard division.

The President: I read Wilbur Mills a couple of intelligence reports last night. It appears that he is getting weak in his stomach. I told him that if we have to send the 82nd Airborne and call up a Marine Division that this could run five to seven billion dollars.

I asked Mills if he could trim that out anywhere. Mills suggested that we let him put back on the taxes that had been taken off some \$24 billion. I told him I would not object to anything he and Joe Fowler wanted to do. He left with the opinion that we should have a tax bill. I don't know whether this would hold up.

I continue to think that somebody has to put this whole matter into perspective. We are letting the other side have the floor and saying nothing.

We have got to get out what General Abrams said about the ARVN. We must come up with some of the answers people are asking without putting any more gasoline on this fire. One thing we have to do is put more support in Korea. I think it is only a matter of hours before General Westmoreland will ask us to move on additional requests. All of you look at every contingency.

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General Maxwell Taylor says he has some very deep concerns. We must at least be prepared. Let's hope for the best but expect the worst. I guess that will be that Westmoreland will need more troops. Let's be ready. Is our air support deterring the enemy around Khe Sanh and elsewhere?

Secretary McNamara: Yes, it is deterring them. If they need more air power they will have it.

Secretary Rusk: I understand the tactical situation around Khe Sanh, but I do not see the strategic situation very clearly. Is there some way we can turn this around and take the offensive ourselves.

Secretary McNamara: The answer from the Joint Chiefs will be to try a false offensive or an actual invasion against North Vietnam above the DMZ. They will say we should develop a feint or invade north of the DMZ.

Secretary Rusk: This is more of a political decision than a military one.

Walt Rostow: As near as we can make it out, the reserves now being held back would go in somewhere outside of Khe Sanh. They would from an outside point level pressure on the attacking forces. We may not have the people to take care of unexpected situations around Khe Sanh. How many men are tied down in the cities. What can we do to get more men out there.

Secretary McNamara: We could accelerate the dispatch of four battalions which are due in April.

The President: Harry, (Harry McPherson) get me a talking paper for my discussion with Fulbright about the Rusk appearance. Now let's call in the Joint Chiefs who have been waiting.

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