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#71a notes	Notes from 2/20/68 - 1:05 p.m. Tuesday luncheon with Rusk, McNamara, Wheeler, Helms, Rostow, Clifford [Sanitized NLJ 83-13] Secret 9 pp. <i>Sanitized NLJ 92-142 10-5-99</i>	2/20/68	A

FILE LOCATION

Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 2

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FEBRUARY 20, 1968 - 1:05 p.m.

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TUESDAY LUNCHEON MEETING WITH ADVISORS

Secretary Rusk
Secretary McNamara
General Wheeler
Director Helms

Walt Rostow
Clark Clifford
George Christian
Tom Johnson

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 20, 1968

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FOR THE PRESIDENT

Tom

FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of your meeting with the Foreign Policy Advisors at the regular Tuesday luncheon, of February 20, 1968, in the Family Dining Room.

Those who attended were:

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

The meeting began 1:05 p.m. The meeting ended at 2:50 p.m.

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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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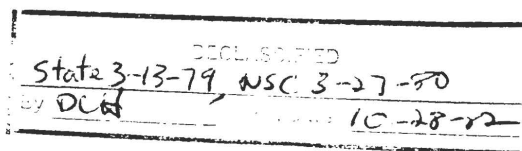
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Luncheon with the President

Tuesday, February 20, 1968, 1:00 p.m.

AGENDA

1. Viet Nam: Sitrep
 - Intelligence evaluation of enemy intentions (Mr. Helms)
 - Situation on the ground (Gen. Wheeler)
2. Gen. Wheeler's Trip (The President)
 - Objectives.
 - Query: Should Katzenbach go from State? Or Habib? The question is one of high or low State visibility.
 - Time of return (February 26?).
 - Planning that should go forward in preparation for General Wheeler's return and recommendations.
3. PUEBLO. (Sects. Rusk and McNamara)
 - Documents: What do they show?
 - Latest meeting with North Koreans (midnight Monday): a report)
 - Diplomatic prospects.
 - Next steps.
 - Task force on South Korea, as recommended by Vance.
4. Other.



Wheeler. Rostow

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Tuesday, February 20, 1968 -- 10:05 a.m

Mr. President:

I asked Gen. Taylor to formulate for your use at lunch today some of the questions which you may wish Gen. Wheeler and his party to answer upon their return.

One important question he did not include is: What are GVN and U.S. plans for assuring that we regain population control in the countryside and resume momentum in revolutionary development?

As I read the intelligence, it seems more and more likely that they are going to try to pin us cheaply in the cities with mortar and harassing attacks in II, III and IV Corps and build up VC control over the population in the countryside.

W. W. Rostow

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By ms, NARS, Date 11-4-83

WWRostow:rla

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Meeting began: 1:05 p.m.
Meeting ended: 2:50 p.m.

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S LUNCHEON MEETING
WITH
FOREIGN POLICY ADVISORS

February 20, 1968
In the Mansion

SANITIZED
E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6
NLJ 92-142
By CG, NARA Date 9-16-99

Secretary McNamara discussed his appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the Tonkin Gulf incident. "So far it's a draw."

Clark Clifford: Have they gotten into any of the North Vietnamese radio traffic?

Secretary McNamara: Yes. This is highly classified.

Secretary Rusk: Why has Fulbright not let your statement out?

Secretary McNamara: It is obvious he wanted to get out his side first.

Secretary Rusk: If he does, will you go with your release?

Secretary McNamara: Yes. It is a can of worms. They will try to cloud the issue.

The President: Who took the lead in opposing and defending you?

Secretary McNamara: Senator Lausche was on our side. Senator Morse was doing the most damage, trying to prove we provoked the incident. Senator McCarthy was nasty personally. Senator Cooper was decent. Senator Mundt did not find the opening he wanted. Sparkman was marginally helpful. So was Senator Mansfield and Senator Hickenhooper on one occasion.

The President: How long do you expect it to go on?

Secretary McNamara: All day. Senator Morse said it may go on through tomorrow, but I am going to try to cut it off today.

The President: I suppose you have a better case on the fact the attack occurred than on the charge that we did provoke the attack.

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Secretary McNamara: I have a good case that there was an attack. They think we responded too soon.

(At 12:23, Secretary McNamara received a call from Phil Goulding. Goulding said Senator McCarthy had already made a statement about Secretary McNamara's testimony before the committee. In light of this, Secretary McNamara said to go ahead and issue his statement.)

Secretary McNamara said McCarthy went out and told the press that one of the U. S. vessels penetrated North Vietnamese waters. "He just did not listen. That is exactly what I thought would happen."

Clark Clifford: Would the President like to report on his visit with President Eisenhower?

The President: I enjoyed the trip very much. I intend to get away from here Wednesday afternoon and spend the weekend in Texas.

We first went to Fort Bragg with General Johnson and General Walt. I made a brief speech and stood at an aircraft while the men loaded aboard.

I told them that there were 500,000 of their buddies in Vietnam and that General Westmoreland had asked for their help. I said if they had been out there and needed help, I know they would have wanted us to respond when we were asked.

Those boys expressed no sentiment, but it was obvious to me that none of them was happy to be going. It was a very serious moment to be going. The whole trip was great. Everybody knew what to do. There were no complaints.

General Seitz, Commander of the 82nd Airborne said to me, "This is the proudest moment of my entire life."

About 50% of the men down there were Negroes. I understand they volunteered because of the high morale in the Airborne and the extra pay.

From there we went to El Toro and spoke to the men inside the hangar. After a three-minute talk I walked down rows of men. I told myself -- I am at heart a sentimental guy at times like those -- that I sure regret having to send those men. One soldier really melted me and brought me to my knees. I asked a boy from Ohio if he had been to Vietnam before. He

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said yes, he had been there four times. I asked him if he had a family. He said yes, sir, he had a little baby boy born yesterday. There wasn't a tear in his eye. No bitterness showed in his face. But I can assure you I sure stopped asking any men questions for awhile. I saw them load the plane. The people moved with precision. I went inside the plane. There were 94 men in there, all in place. I talked to them a few minutes and then saw the plane take off. That's a rather rough feeling.

From there I went to see men on the Carrier. They are going back to Yankee Station. I met many of the men on the ship. Ninety-five percent of them think we should be doing more in Vietnam. They said they would not mind giving their lives but they were a little more war-like and kept saying, "It's not cost effective to fight the war like this."

I had 25 men in for breakfast. All they knew was that they had a job and they wanted to do it well. They wanted to keep the pilots and the equipment in the air and in good shape. They lost one plane with a flame out and each of them felt a very personal loss of the three men. I would be glad to have any of them looking after my plane. They made a good impression.

I remember one thing about the trip in particular. When I was speaking to the 82nd Airborne I came to a line in my speech when I said, "You are the Airborne." A roar came up from the crowd unlike anything I have ever heard before with "All the way, sir." They like the prestige of the Airborne.

I almost froze in my Captain's quarters aboard the Constellation. I turned the electric blanket upto 9. About 3 o'clock, and every hour after, I went to the door and saw this big hulk of a Marine. I kept telling him, "I am freezing." He kept saying, "yes, sir." But he never moved.

General Wheeler: I'll bet he had orders not to move and nobody telling him to move, even including you, was going to affect his orders.

The President: Well, I quit trying at 6 o'clock. I said, go get Rostow. We had breakfast and then met with all of the men. I can say to you Secretaries and Generals, that even Senator Fulbright couldn't find anything wrong with those men and that operation. It makes me feel sorry that we worry about creature comforts with these men who go back three and four times and who fly 25 hours straight into combat.

The crew was the proudest. They have the major responsibility for getting the men safely to Vietnam.

After the Constellation, we returned to see President Eisenhower and to get his judgment. I think he has been mistreated by history and by misinterpretation.

He said that he did not intend to play politics with Rusk and McNamara. He said it is a mistake to second guess the people who know the information. He spoke glowingly of General Wheeler and General Westmoreland and General Goodpastor^{sr}. He said he saw no justification for the criticism of General Westmoreland. He said he remembered in another war when people sat on the sidelines and said there was a better way, but he preferred to leave that to the judgment of the men who had the better information.

He said there were two people he had most respect for. Who would you think they are?

Secretary Rusk: General Marshall?

General Wheeler: Churchill?

Director Helms: General McArthur?

The President: It was Marshall and Churchill. He told me some stories about General Marshall. He said that Marshall was an impersonal man. He brought Ike up from Fort Sam to handle operations. He ordered General Eisenhower to draft the invasion order and plan. Ike said he guesses he was a little vain and a little cocky and he went to General Marshall and said, "I hope the General knows that I have spent many hours on this plan and that it is O.K." General Marshall told him "Eisenhower, I hope it is too. You may be the one called upon to execute it."

In addition, Eisenhower said that Churchill wanted to go into battle. Eisenhower told Churchill he did not think it was wise to go into battle because of the additional security that must be provided. When Churchill told the King, the King also said He wanted to go. As far as Churchill was concerned, that ended it. He didn't go.

General Eisenhower said that Westmoreland carries more responsibility than any General in the history of this country. He said we should give him everything he needs and then let him fight the war.

I asked him how many allies he had under his command during World War II. He said, including U. S. and allied troops, he had about five million.

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I told him General Westmoreland had 500,000 men, so how could he say that Westmoreland had the greatest responsibility of any American general?

He said it was a different kind of war and General Westmoreland doesn't know who the enemy is and there is not any clearly defined front.

Ike said, I am a mean Republican, but I am not going to be partisan on the war.

Then General Eisenhower was asked how he got legislation passed when he was President. He said he told the visitor that he had a speaker from Texas and a Majority Leader from Texas, both Democrats. He said his leader was Knolton of California.

He said he could call in Mr. Sam and me and say why a certain piece of legislation was best for the country and that the two of us would do it if it were in the best interest of the country. He said this was often not the case with his own party.

General Eisenhower said that we had always done what we thought was best for the country, particularly when he called on us. He intended to do the same thing now.

He called me and told me of a rough wire he received from three scientists who told him I planned to drop the nuclear bomb. I told him I had talked to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense and that no one had recommended nuclear weapons in the last four years.

Now, what do we do with this trip of General Wheeler's?

Secretary Rusk: Can we keep this trip very quiet until Buzz gets there? I am worried about what they might do to the airport if they knew he were coming.

The President: We talk too much anyway. Ike said it is criminal to announce the location of men or units or headquarters. He said the press can talk about the way in which the war is being directed but that it is wrong to say anything about when or where or how it is being fought.

Ike said we should get the other government to restrict coverage and that he never would have said that we were sending 10,500 men. He said he

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would think General Giap would just love to have that information.

General Wheeler: I will leave tomorrow night and return on Tuesday the 27th.

The President: What should we do while Buzz is out there?

Secretary McNamara: There is nothing we need to do that we haven't done. We should wait until Buzz comes back.

General Wheeler: General Westmoreland said that the intelligence indicated there might be a major attack tonight on Saigon. As of this morning, nothing of a sizeable nature had happened.

Walt Rostow: It has been quiet up until the time of the meeting.

The President: What about targets? Should we retaliate for these strikes?

General Wheeler: The weather is terrible except for an occasional day. We can make systems runs on certain targets. I don't want to sound like a broken record, but I still feel the best thing is to squeeze down the circle and then authorize armed reconnaissance.

Secretary McNamara: May I leave? (The Secretary had to return to the Hill where he was testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.)

General Wheeler showed maps of the Haiphong-Hanoi area. The General pointed to high value targets and said that systems runs on these targets should be considered. He recommended reducing the circles around Hanoi and Haiphong to three miles and 1 1/2 miles and permitting armed reconnaissance.

The General pointed out the northeast arm of the railroad and Highway 1-A. In addition, he pointed out the inland port of Hanoi. He said it was an inland port used for barges to bring in supplies.

Secretary Rusk: I would not object to systems runs. There would be a limitation of 15 miles along the China border. I would hit the highway and the railroad.

Walt Rostow: How about a systems run on Hanoi radio headquarters?

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General Wheeler: We could hit it. It is part of the Air Defense System in the area.

The President: Go get it. It has been previously authorized anyway.

General Wheeler: May we reduce the circles to 1 1/2 and 3 miles?

The President: Do you have any trouble with that, Dean?

Secretary Rusk: It will get a lot of civilians but I feel less strong about the matter now. Let me look at this and get back to you later.

The President: Take the 15 mile limit.

General Wheeler: How about a systems run on the Hanoi port?

The President: How do you feel about that?

Secretary Rusk: O.K.

Clark Clifford: O.K.

The President: What is a systems run?

Secretary Rusk: It is bad weather bombing.

General Wheeler: It is not as good as visional bombing.

Clark Clifford: Is it safer with a systems run?

General Wheeler: It is somewhat more safe. Planes can go in at night and also in bad weather.

The President: Do you want to send anybody with Wheeler?

Secretary Rusk: I want to send Habib with Wheeler.

General Wheeler: We have made space for him on the plane.

The President: O.K. What is the enemy upto, Dick?

Director Helms: It is clear the enemy had a poor assessment of what would happen. They thought a political uprising would take place. They did not get it.

Based on the documents, they are now re-evaluating and are much more flexible in their attitude. They are now attacking some cities with mortars and some with troops. Meanwhile, they are not coming out with any real forces for ground attacks. They are busy in the countryside. They have a manpower pool out there to draw on.

What they do in the future depends on what we do.

The President: How did they get the countryside?

Director Helms: All of the ARVN and U.S. forces have come in to protect the cities.

General Wheeler: Not all.

Director Helms: Most. In addition, it appears that the North Vietnamese may not attack Khesanh now. They may wait and try to hold us down and move their troops in along the coast. We have a rough problem at Quang Tri.

General Wheeler: General Westmoreland said the ARVN troops are tired and some have taken rather heavy casualties.

The President: What is the latest on the Pueblo?

Secretary Rusk: The question is do we stand where we are or try to find a formula that will get the men released? Although we would never want it released, the log of the ship which was publicized by the North Koreans shows some very obvious contradictions. For example, if the log they gave out -- for it to be an accurate one -- the ship would have to be able to travel at twice the speed it is capable of moving.

I believe the men are trying to give us a signal and indicate that they do not want us to accept their confession as valid.

(Then the President and the group discussed a statement which was under consideration. In the statement, the word "apology" was used.)

Secretary Rusk: I dislike the use of the word "apology." I think the word

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regret would be a better one.

Director Helms: [REDACTED]

General Wheeler: I think we should take the word "apologies" out. I would say regret. But I want to get the men back. I am worried about the way they might be treated.

The President: How are we coming on that Task Force Cy Vance recommended to study our needs in South Korea?

Secretary Rusk: Nick Katzenbach is following up on that.

The President: Let's get on it.

Clark Clifford: I would look at this cable a long time. I would check it with Ambassador Porter and with people on the Hill. I would read it to the leadership. I don't think we want to rush into it. I would like more support on this than we have. It will be interpreted that we have decided to "cave in". It also would be upsetting to the South Koreans.

Secretary Rusk: I still don't think it would get the North Koreans to free the ship.

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

February 19, 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: General Wheeler's Visit to Vietnam

Reflecting on the possible objectives of General Wheeler's visit, I would hope that he would obtain answers to some of the fundamental questions which are troubling us, derived from detailed private discussions with General Westmoreland and his staff. The questions which need exploring appear to me to include the following:

- a What are Westy's operational plans, force requirements, and force availabilities for the following contingencies?
 - (1) A renewal of the attack of the cities accompanied by simultaneous or successive enemy offensives against Khe Sanh, the eastern DMZ and the Darlac-Kontum border.
 - (2) A spring-summer offensive by friendly forces to regain the initiative and to exploit the weakened condition of the enemy when his offensive has run out of steam.
 - (3) An evacuation of Khe Sanh under attack.
- b How will the defense of Khe Sanh contribute to a major defeat of the enemy? What will be the scheme of maneuver of the reinforcements brought into the Khe Sanh area?
- c Taking the foregoing contingencies into account, what reinforcements will General Westmoreland need during this calendar year?
- d What enemy units have been identified in the attacks on the cities? What uncommitted units are available for a second cycle?
- e What grounds are there for the allegation of an "intelligence failure" at the time of the first wave of attacks on the cities? How does General Westmoreland feel about the functioning of his own and the Vietnamese intelligence services in connection with this situation?

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By DCH	NARS, Date 11-9-82

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f What has been the nature of our psychological warfare activities directed at North Vietnam and the VC since January 30?

These are all hard questions for which there are probably no final answers at this time but whatever Bus can bring back will be most helpful.

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