



TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE
FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

SUMMARY NOTES OF 546th NSC MEETING
February 7, 1965; 8:00 to 9:45 A.M.

Reprisal Strikes in North Vietnam

There was a discussion of the statement to be issued from the White House announcing the reprisal air strikes in North Vietnam.

Senator Mansfield: Why cannot we handle this matter through the United Nations? Can't the Geneva powers act?

The President: This cannot be done.

Secretary McNamara: The surprise attack on our base at Pleiku resulted in 7 U.S. deaths and 109 wounded. Numerous U.S. planes were damaged.

In reprisal, four army barracks in North Vietnam were attacked. Three of the four targets were weathered in. Either the attack planes did not take off or they went to the target but could not see enough to drop their bombs. A total of 33 attack aircraft were involved, plus 8 planes providing aircap and 8 planes engaged in flak suppression.

As to our next move, Ambassador Taylor recommends we attack the three targets not hit because of weather. Notwithstanding his recommendation, no U.S. planes should take part in a second attack. A South Vietnamese attack on their target is acceptable. We would provide an aircap of 4 to 8 planes plus 4 to 8 flak suppression planes to assist the South Vietnamese.

Under Secretary Ball: The reprisal by the South Vietnamese would be for the Viet Cong attack on a South Vietnam village. This is a different situation from the strikes authorized yesterday. We need to avoid appearing to respond only when Americans are attacked.

Secretary McNamara is right in recommending that we should not hit today the three targets not hit yesterday. If we do so, the Communists will get a wrong signal and think that we are launching an offensive. Our officials in Saigon want a graduated response to the entire North Vietnamese military effort rather than merely retaliatory strikes to attacks by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong.

General Wheeler: The Chiefs believe that ground action against the North Vietnamese effort is adequate to reverse the situation. Air strikes on the three targets are not necessary from a military point of view. However, a South Vietnamese attack on their target is acceptable.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

NSC letter 10/24/80	
By <i>[Signature]</i>	Date 8-13-82

Ambassador Thompson: We have completed our reprisal action for the North Vietnamese surprise attack. Another attack cannot be called reprisal. The punishment should fit the crime. No additional air strikes should be made now.

(The statement to be issued by the White House was approved and given to George Reedy for release to the press.)

Secretary Dillon: If we encourage an air strike by the South Vietnamese, everyone will think it is a U.S. attack. Therefore, we should send along U.S. planes to ensure that the South Vietnamese strike is successful.

Representative Ford: Why should we only hit one out of four targets? If the plan to strike four was good, why should we not complete it?

Several Council members explained the nature of the decision to make a reprisal strike only.

The President: We need to know the extent of the damage caused by yesterday's strike. This will have a bearing on future decisions. We should give consideration to Taylor's recommendation but for the time being, we should approve a strike by the South Vietnamese only. Bomb damage assessment flights by U.S. planes should be flown.

Secretary McNamara, turning to the question of withdrawing dependents, circulated a text of a White House release covering the subject. It would announce the immediate withdrawal of dependents or their withdrawal in a two-week period, as Ambassador Taylor prefers.

The President: For 15 months we have been trying to bring about the withdrawal of dependents. Thus, a decision to do so within 15 days is acceptable. The number of days in which they will be withdrawn can be worked out so long as it is absolutely certain that the dependents are coming out.

Secretary McNamara: The Hawk Battalion will go ashore at Danang today. Some planes which were diverted and went on to Saigon can be used for withdrawing dependents. As many as 400 or 500 can be removed on these planes.

The President: Do we think that Saigon is going to be a target? If so, why should we make any announcement about the withdrawal of dependents? We should hold the announcement until we have talked to Ambassador Taylor by phone. The word "orderly" should be taken out of the announcement.

The announcement as finally released is attached.

Also attached is the transcript of the Press Secretary's briefing at 10:00 A.M. February 7.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FEBRUARY 7, 1965

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

Following meetings with the National Security Council, I have directed the orderly withdrawal of American dependents from South Vietnam.

It has become clear that Hanoi has undertaken a more aggressive course of action against both South Vietnamese and American installations, and against Americans who are in South Vietnam assisting the people of that country to defend their freedom. We have no choice now but to clear the decks and make absolutely clear our continued determination to back South Vietnam in its fight to maintain its independence.

In addition to this action, I have ordered the deployment to South Vietnam of a HAWK air defense battalion. Other reinforcements, ~~i.e.~~ units and individuals may follow.

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH GEORGE REEDY

10:09 A.M. EST

FEBRUARY 7, 1965

SUNDAY

MR. REEDY: The Security Council met from 8:00 A.M. this morning until 9:20 and reviewed the actions that have been announced to you in the White House statement. The Council authorized the issuance of the statement and the President requested the State Department officials and the Defense Department officials to assemble all of the detailed information that can possibly be presented, and as is customary in these matters, the agency involved, the Defense Department, will make them public at a press conference sometime today. The time will be announced.

Are there any questions?

Q. George, could you tell us what the Southern area of North Vietnam includes, does that include Hanoi?

MR. REEDY: I will defer that until the Pentagon statement this afternoon.

Q. Could you give us the time of the earlier NSC meeting?

MR. REEDY: Last night from 7:45 until 9 o'clock.

Q. George, could you give us the whole chronology?

MR. REEDY: I can't give you the precise times, but he was notified yesterday afternoon as soon as the information of the Viet Cong attack became available in Washington.

Q. Where was he, in the Mansion or —

MR. REEDY: I don't know. Just as soon as the information came to Washington, which would have been sometime before the wires carried the first announcement of it.

Q. Would that come in on the teletype downstairs?

MR. REEDY: I don't want to go into the exact way those things come in. He conferred with the officials of the State Department, Defense Department, CIA. He called the National Security Council meeting for 7:45 as I have already told you. The meeting lasted until 9 o'clock and at that meeting the appropriate decisions were made which have been announced.

Q. Was Secretary Rusk there?

MR. REEDY: Under Secretary Ball was there.

Q. Was McCone there?

MR. REEDY: No, CIA was represented by Marshal Carter.

Q. Was Vice President Humphrey there?

MR. REEDY: No, he is not in town.

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Q. Is McCone sick?

MR. REEDY: No, he is out of town.

Q. Who represented CIA?

MR. REEDY: Marshal Carter, the Acting Director.

Q. Did all these meetings take place in the Mansion?

MR. REEDY: No, they took place in the Cabinet Room.

Q. Including this morning?

MR. REEDY: Yes.

Q. George, I have been asked to ask if the White House sees any connection with the events and Kosygin in Hanoi?

MR. REEDY: I am deferring all comment at the present time.

Q. At 9 o'clock or whatever time it broke up, the orders went out to carry out these raids?

MR. REEDY: The decision was made at 9:00. I don't know the operational details but it would be as rapidly as possible.

Q. Did the President sit up during the night for reports to come in or anything like that?

MR. REEDY: I didn't follow his every minute, Ron, but he of course was kept informed of the actions.

Q. Was he awake for most of the night?

MR. REEDY: I would say he had very little sleep last night.

Q. George, what is he doing this morning since the NSC meeting, is he planning any further meetings or is he going to church or anything like that?

MR. REEDY: At the present time he is reviewing some of the reports on this matter. I do not have any further plans for the day. I will certainly keep you informed of them whatever they are.

Q. What is your guess about church?

MR. REEDY: I won't guess at this point.

Q. Would you characterize these as emergency meetings?

MR. REEDY: They certainly weren't routine meetings scheduled well in advance.

Q. Have there been any communications with the Soviet side about this thing?

MR. REEDY: I do not know.

Q. George, it says here joint retaliatory attacks were ordered. Is this a continuous action or very specific attacks ordered?

MR. REEDY: Specific orders were given and the operational details I am deferring until later.

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Q. You cannot say whether this was one series of attacks authorized?

MR. REEDY: As I said specific orders were given for specific attacks.

Q. George, we are aware and so are the North Vietnamese of certain attacks that have already occurred, is it possible this operational order envisages other attacks that might be taking place at this instant, for example?

MR. REEDY: I am not going to comment on that matter. I would rather wait until all details are assembled from the field which will not be for a lengthy period.

Q. George, the last time U.S. Forces attacked North Vietnam similar to this we called for a UN Security Council meeting. Is there any consideration being given to that at the present time?

MR. REEDY: At the present time I am going to stand on the statement which describes the operation and the reason for the operation. Whatever further decisions are made of course will be announced as soon as appropriate.

Q. George, on the previous occasion it was late at night, the President went on to make announcements to the American people. Are you asking for any time today?

MR. REEDY: No.

Q. The last time I think the wording of the announcement was such that the attacks were underway. The wording of this seems to imply the attacks were completed and you are waiting for results. Is that correct?

MR. REEDY: I think I will leave you to whatever assumption you want to make about it.

Q. George, has he an appointment scheduled with Bundy for any specific time?

MR. REEDY: No.

Q. George, he is on his way now —

MR. REEDY: The latest word I have is sometime tomorrow morning.

Q. I gather it is stepped up?

MR. REEDY: It may be.

Q. George, would you try to get from the Air Aide's office or from the Pentagon for us ETAs for Bundy along the way --Hawaii, West Coast if there is one and Andrews?

MR. REEDY: I will see what I can do.

Q. More particularly his ETA here?

MR. REEDY: Yes.

Q. The statement you issued earlier said results of the attack would be announced as soon as reported from the field?

MR. REEDY: Right.

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SERVICE SET

Q. Is the Pentagon account going to contain all information?

MR. REEDY: Oh, yes. The President's statement was that he wanted all of the information put out that possibly could be put out.

Q. Who is going to give that briefing?

MR. REEDY: Secretary McNamara.

Q. George, were members of Congress at the NSC meeting?

MR. REEDY: Yes. Last night Senator Mansfield and Speaker MacCormack. This morning Senator Mansfield, Speaker MacCormack and Representative Ford.

Q. Was Dirksen invited and unable to attend?

MR. REEDY: I do not know.

Q. Were any of our allies informed of this action?

MR. REEDY: As I said, I am standing on the statement at the present time.

Q. George, could you tell us are there also press conferences going on in Saigon or is everything to be issued from the Pentagon?

MR. REEDY: There was a statement out of Saigon this morning. I don't know if there is a press conference or not.

Q. Do you expect anything further yourself?

MR. REEDY: Not for the time being, no.

THE PRESS: Thank you, George.

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THE FOLLOWING ATTENDED THE 546th NSC MEETING AT
8:00 AM ON FEBRUARY 7, 1965

The President of the United States, Presiding

Speaker McCormack

Senator Mansfield

Representative Gerald Ford, Jr.

CIA

William Colby, Chief of Far Eastern Division
Lt. Gen. Marshall Carter, Deputy Director

DEFENSE

Robert S. McNamara, Secretary
Cyrus Vance, Deputy Secretary

JCS

General Earle G. Wheeler, USA, Chairman

STATE

George W. Ball, Under Secretary
Llewellyn E. Thompson, Ambassador-at-Large
Thomas Mann, Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs
William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs
James Greenfield, Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs

TREASURY

C. Douglas Dillon, Secretary

USIA

Carl T. Rowan, Director

WHITE HOUSE

George Reedy
Major General Chester V. Clifton
Bill Moyers
Jack Valenti
Douglass Cater
Bromley Smith

cc: Marie Fehmer