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#2 report	<p>Summary Notes of 550th NSC Meeting</p> <p>secret 4 p</p> <p>sanitized 5-14-84</p> <p>NLJ 82-284</p> <p>same sanitization 11-30-88 NLJ 86-223</p> <p>declassified in full 4-1-93</p> <p>NLJ 91-163</p>	03/26/65	A

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~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~
FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

SUMMARY NOTES OF 550th NSC MEETING
March 26, 1965; 1:15 to 2:40 P.M.

Vietnam

CIA Director McCone summarized the Vietnam situation including reactions abroad to U.S. air strikes on North Vietnam:

- a. In South Vietnam, the U.S. attacks greatly improved military morale and stabilized the government situation in Saigon.
- b. Hanoi stated its determination to stand up to the air attacks. It has given no hint that it is ready to accept negotiations.
- c. Communist China urged Hanoi to stand firm. Peking continues to provide military assistance to Hanoi. The Chinese Communists are not yet ready to get into the fight.
- d. The Soviets have no choice but to support Hanoi. The Vietnam war has the effect of intensifying the Sino-Soviet split.

The intelligence community estimates that Hanoi remains unconvinced that they cannot win out militarily. They are not yet ready to negotiate. Sustained U.S. air attacks on North Vietnam may prompt Hanoi to offer negotiations on the condition that the air attacks are called off. The State intelligence representative thinks that the Chinese Communists will respond by sending combat troops before Hanoi reaches the point of being forced to accept negotiations. The rest of the intelligence community believes that the Chinese Communists will probably not attack U.S. planes or ships or send in their ground army.

There is no hard evidence that the Chinese Communists are blocking Soviet efforts to send aid to North Vietnam. There are some indications that this is being done, such as the refusal of overflight clearances for Soviet planes flying materiel to North Vietnam.

Secretary Rusk: Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin called at his request at noon.

Ambassador Thompson -- Dobrynin said:

- a. The Soviets cannot disassociate themselves from the fate of a socialist country such as North Vietnam.
- b. The Soviets are giving assistance to Hanoi.

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Ambassador Thompson (cont'd.):

c. The Soviets warned us in advance that we were following a dangerous path in escalating the war in Vietnam. We are jeopardizing US/USSR relations. The U.S. has assumed a grave responsibility by continuing its aggression against the North Vietnamese Government. The United States should withdraw its forces from all of Vietnam and strictly observe the Geneva Agreement of 1954.

d. The U.S. continues its bombing of Laos and has opposed the holding of a conference on Laos.

e. U.S. actions in Vietnam -- as well as support of the MLF -- create a poor atmosphere for disarmament talks.

f. The United States has underestimated the serious effect of the current crisis.

Secretary Rusk: It is a pity that the U.S. and the USSR are being dragged along by North Vietnam. There is a difference between one country attacking another and the USSR supporting another socialist country. The Soviets are paralyzed by U.S. bombing and, as long as it continues, they cannot take any political action without exposing themselves to the criticism that they are not defending a socialist country. We do not know what they will do, however, if the bombing is stopped.

The effect of the U.S. air strikes was serious, but the attacks have not created a crisis. Our aim is to get Hanoi to realize that the North Vietnamese cannot win over South Vietnam without danger of our escalating the war.

We are still taking our lumps on the alleged use of gas in Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor will arrive Sunday for discussion of fresh efforts to be made in Vietnam. Recently, the South Vietnamese Foreign Minister said publicly that a separate North and South Vietnam is acceptable to Saigon.

USIA Director Rowan: The world press is still critical of our alleged use of gas in Vietnam but there has been some turn-around. No explanation of the facts, i.e., that the gas was the type used to control riots, will do much good because of the worldwide emotional reaction to the word "gas".

Secretary Rusk: Ambassador Kohler refused to accept and sent back to the Soviet Foreign Ministry the Soviet note on what they described as gas warfare in Vietnam.

Secretary McNamara: Since February 9, there have been 19 U.S. air raids in North Vietnam, 13 of these in the last week. The strikes were moderately successful from a military point of view. The North Vietnamese radar are very hard to destroy. Of the planes attacking North Vietnam, 80 percent are U.S. and 20 percent are South Vietnamese.

We now have 28,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland are asking for 10,000 more.

Viet Cong activity dropped off this week and has been lower than normal since February 9. We estimate that the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam total 40,000 regular troops plus 100,000 irregulars. We are planning to increase the ratio of free world troops to that of the Viet Cong/North Vietnamese.

U.S. casualties have increased and the level of fatalities is high.

General Wheeler: General Johnson's program of 21 points is being implemented. More U.S. aircraft are being shipped. The proposal to introduce U.S. combat troops will be looked at when General Taylor arrives here next week. An extensive logistics program is being implemented, in addition to General Johnson's program. A second action program is being drawn up.

The President: Dates should be put behind each program. Next week the Joint Chiefs should meet with me to discuss their new military plans.

It is unlikely that present political actions will meet the situation. We should plan for a bigger political effort to reverse the current trend. New political actions should be proposed for consideration.

An overall policy speech on Vietnam should be prepared. We should enlist new brain power in drafting the things which need to be said. One grows tired of reading only what the other side is saying. We should crank up our propaganda effort. Last week we did reasonably well to overcome the adverse reaction to our use of riot control gas.

A stabilizing effect on the press resulted from statements which were put out concerning our not talking about our military actions. We should quietly make clear the huge amount of time which we spend defending ourselves from our domestic opponents. More time should be spent on new initiatives. Perhaps we should have two Councils -- one defensive and one offensive. New initiatives are required. We can only be pleased that the current Vietnam government hasn't fallen.

CIA Director McCone: Prime Minister Quat has made some progress in Saigon.

Secretary Rusk: None of the South Vietnamese leaders are good with crowds.

CIA Director McCone: The intelligence community agrees with the summary of worldwide reactions to our use of gas as given by Mr. Rowan.

The President: How did this whole gas incident happen? Was it a Communist plot?

USIA Director Rowan: Peter Arnett of the Associated Press didn't write his story out of the blue. We should find out about his background.

Secretary McNamara gave his account of how the gas story got started and, in reply to the President's question, explained our public information system in South Vietnam.

Mr. Rowan: The public information situation was bad two years ago but improved when we increased our military activity. We now have new problems with over 200 reporters based in Saigon. New press guidelines are being sent to Saigon. New press criticism is increasing.

Secretary Rusk raised the question of briefing Senators. They should be briefed as soon as we have something new to say. The Senators are getting nervous. Weekly briefings in executive sessions of the appropriate Senate committees should be considered.

The President: We must think out this problem. We are spending most of our time defending our actions in Vietnam. What about the Stennis report on no equipment failures? Should not this report have gone first to the President and then to the press? Senators other than those on the Foreign Relations and the Armed Services Committees should be called on and given briefings. Separate gatherings should be arranged which would be addressed by only Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara. All questions raised at these sessions should be answered. We should then offer to go up to the Hill to testify on Vietnam every two weeks.

Bromley Smith

LIST OF ATTENDEES, 550th NSC MEETING

March 26, 1965 -- 1:15 P.M.

The Vice President

Secretary of State Rusk

Ambassador-at-Large Llewellyn Thompson

Under Secretary George W. Ball

Assistant Secretary William P. Bundy

Secretary of Defense McNamara

Deputy Secretary Vance

Assistant Secretary McNaughton

JCS Chairman Wheeler

CIA Director McCone

Deputy Director Helms

Secretary of the Treasury Dillon

USIA Director Rowan

OEP Director Ellington

McGeorge Bundy

George Reedy

Bill Moyers

Jack Valenti

Bromley Smith

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

March 26, 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

I think the NSC meeting today should be devoted centrally to Vietnam, and that it would be helpful at this point for all present to take a deep breath and listen to each other for about a half hour in a review of the situation as it now stands. Accordingly, I have asked John McCone to discuss the situation in South Vietnam and the attitudes of the major Communist powers. I have asked Dean Rusk to follow on with a discussion of the political and diplomatic situation, and I have asked Bob McNamara to wind up with a comment from the military side.

The group, although carefully selected, will be quite large, and I doubt if in this group you will wish to go beyond the line you have taken with the Governors and in your Cabinet statement yesterday. (The fact of a possible longer statement or speech is being as tightly held as we know how.)

This meeting is the first for Governor Ellington and the last for Douglas Dillon, and you may wish to say a word about each of them.

McG. B.
McG. B.

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL AGENDA

March 26, 1965 - 1:15

VIETNAM

1. Intelligence review - Director of Central Intelligence
 - a. The situation in South Vietnam
 - b. Estimates of Communist reaction and intent --
Hanoi, Peking and Moscow
2. The political and diplomatic situation - The Secretary of State
3. The military situation - Secretary of Defense

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ATTENDANCE LIST FOR THE 550th NSC MEETING
MARCH 26, 1965, AT 1:15 PM IN THE CABINET ROOM
OF THE WHITE HOUSE

The President of the United States, Presiding

The Vice Present of the United States

CIA

John A. McCone, Director

Richard Helms, Deputy Director of Plans

DEFENSE

Robert S. McNamara, Secretary

Cyrus Vance, Deputy Secretary

John McNaughton, Assistant Secretary (ISA)

JCS

General Earle G. Wheeler, USA, Chairman

OEP

Buford Ellington, Director

STATE

Dean Rusk, Secretary

George W. Ball, Under Secretary

William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs

Llewellyn Thompson, Ambassador-at-Large

TREASURY

C. Douglas Dillon, Secretary

USIA

Carl T. Rowan, Director

WHITE HOUSE

McGeorge Bundy

George Reedy

Bill Moyers

Bromley Smith

Jack Valenti

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