

Authority NSC letter 10-24-80By DCH, NARS, Date 9-2-81TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE
FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLYSUMMARY NOTES OF 545th NSC MEETING
February 6, 1965; 7:45 P.M.Reprisal Strikes in North Vietnam

(This is a partial record of the meeting because the writer was in and out of the Cabinet Room talking by secure phone from the Situation Room to McGeorge Bundy in Saigon.)

The meeting opened with a discussion of how to react to the surprise attack by the Viet Cong on the U.S. Army barracks at Pleiku in South Vietnam and other attacks on two South Vietnamese airfields. A recommendation was made that U.S. planes attack three targets in North Vietnam and the South Vietnamese, with U.S. air cover, attack a fourth target. There was recognition that MIG's based near Hanoi might respond to the strikes.

General Wheeler: CINCPAC reports that if he receives an execute message by 10:00 P.M. tonight, his planes could be over their targets in North Vietnam at 3:00 P.M. their time.

The President gave the following figures on the four recommended targets:

| <u>Target</u> | <u>Troops</u> | <u>Military Casualties</u> | <u>Civilians</u> |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| Dong Hoi Barracks | 6,000 | 3,600 | 40 |
| Vit Thu Lu Barracks | 150 | 90 | 0 |
| Chap Le Army Barracks | 1,200 | 720 | 30 |
| Vu Con Barracks | ----- | NO GOOD ESTIMATES | ----- |

General Wheeler: The attack on Pleiku came as a surprise. There were no South Vietnamese casualties. Our forces were in a compound outside the town. The area has been quiet recently. At one time it was General Khanh's headquarters and formerly was pacified.

Secretary McNamara: However, the Viet Cong had recently been building up in this area.

Under Secretary Ball: We are all in accord that action must be taken. We need to decide how we shall handle the air strikes publicly. The Soviets may call for a conference. We must make clear that the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong are the same. We retaliate against North Vietnam because Hanoi directs

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SERVICE SET

Under Secretary Ball (cont'd.):

the Viet Cong, supplies arms, and infiltrates men. We need to answer the question as to why we are striking North Vietnam when the Americans were attacked by Viet Cong in South Vietnam.

Deputy Defense Secretary Vance: Arrangements should be made for a joint U.S. -South Vietnamese announcement.

Under Secretary Ball: Should U.S. dependents in South Vietnam be withdrawn at once or only later at a time when the North Vietnamese may be responding to our air attacks?

General Wheeler and Secretary McNamara: Get them out now.

Ambassador Thompson: Should the U.S. dependents be evacuated so quickly that it appears we are running away?

The President: We cannot contemplate the loss of U.S. women and children in an attack by the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong in Saigon or elsewhere. We have long sought to get out the dependents and have been waiting only for the proper atmosphere.

In summary, we have decided to make the air strikes. Our strikes should be arranged so as to hit in daylight hours. We need a recommendation from Saigon. One hundred and twenty U.S. planes would attack three barracks in the south of North Vietnam and a fourth target would be hit by South Vietnamese planes. A final decision is needed within the hour.

Deputy Secretary Vance: The four targets to be struck are those discussed earlier.

General Wheeler: A total of 132 U.S. planes will be involved, plus 22 South Vietnamese planes for a total of 154. Estimates are that we will lose no planes and the South Vietnamese will lose two planes.

There followed a discussion of several issues including the need for U.S. reinforcements following the air strikes, and whether a Congressional resolution was needed to insure the legal position of the Administration. Under Secretary Ball's position was that the quicker we have a resolution, the better.

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Senator Mansfield: The North Vietnamese attack has opened many eyes. We are not now in a penny ante game. It appears that the local populous in South Vietnam is not behind us, else the Viet Cong could not have carried out their surprise attack.

The President said the group would meet again at 8:00 A.M. tomorrow to decide what additional forces should be moved into South Vietnam. The strike on the four targets was authorized and the request was made that commercial transports be used to fly out dependents. (Location of targets to be struck is marked on the attached map and target list.)

Bronley Smith