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#39 meeting notes	<del>1/25/66 meeting with Congressional Leadership on resumption of bombing</del> <del>possible classified information 6 p.</del> <i>open 4-4-82</i>	<del>1/25/66</del>	<del>A</del>

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Meeting in Cabinet Room  
Date: January 25, 1966  
Time: 5:30 p.m. - 7:40 p.m.

Present: Bipartisan Congressional Meeting from Republican-Democratic Leadership. Chairman and ranking members of Appropriations, Armed Services, Foreign Affairs. Senate and House. President, Rusk, McNamara and Valenti.

Subject: Resumption of Bombing.

Rusk recounted peace efforts-- and their fruitlessness.

McCormack: Must protect our soldiers. Use means available to to it. Time has arrived -- unless other side does something.

Ford: What are the alternatives you face right now?

President: Could pull out.

Bomb on heavier scale.

Sit and do nothing.

Decision: When to resume bombing.

Ford: What do your advisers suggest?

President: State, Defense, Joint Chiefs all agree to resume in near future.

Ford: What kind of bombing do they recommend?

President: Security problem. Don't want to telegraph our shots.

Ford: If your advisers say bombing is necessary -- I'm for it.

Mansfield: ~~Does~~ McNamara say that infiltration reached 4500 a month?

McNamara: This is dry season. Usually associated with larger infiltration. Indications of larger infiltration.

Mansfield: Instead of 22 per cent under control, only 18 per cent is under control of VC.

Bombing lull should be continued. We have little to lose by lull. Time is on the side of the enemy. Best chance of getting to peace table is to minimize our military action.

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President ought to issue statement: "Favor cease-fire now. Call for meeting of all interested parties. Call for elections within three to six months. Contemplate withdrawal of our forces after secure amnesty. Favor resumption in conjunction with Geneva Accords."

Lull is to be preferred:

1. Our casualties go up with escalation.
2. Bombs mean civilian deaths -- possibly gas or atom bombs.
3. Increase isolation of U.S.
4. More we destroy North Vietnam, the more we treat with China instead of North Vietnam.

Dirksen: (Recounted Wilson's declaration of war, and how people applauded his declaration of death.)

I am sensitive to young blood as any man.

You can withdraw. This would be a disaster.

You could let this be a war of attrition. Keep what we have. Be patient. But this is expensive and wearing. It doesn't reduce casualties. Country wouldn't support you. Patience is like a holiday in war.

Or you can fight. You go in to win. If we are not winning now, let's do what is necessary to win. I don't believe you have any other choice. I believe the country will support you.

The enemy would be foolish not to use every pause to build up his forces.

Russell: This is the most frustrating experience of my life. I didn't want to get in there, but we are there. I don't think the American people take this war seriously. I don't credit the polls on Vietnam. Those people have been ground under so long, all they want is peace.

I don't know if our Defense Department is adequate enough to meet all our obligations around the world.

We are prepared to fight a war. We are not fighting.

I think we have gone too far in this lull -- although I recognize the reason. This pause has cost you militarily. We are going to lose a lot of boys as a

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result -- casualties of our care for peace.

For God sakes, don't start the bombing half way. Let them know they are in a war. We killed civilians in World War II and nobody opposed. I'd rather kill them than have American boys die. Please, Mr. President, don't get one foot back in it. Go all the way.

Saltonstall: It's clear to me if we have our boys there, we have to go forward with bombing. Don't want to broaden the targets so much as to include civilians, but there are enough targets there.

I believe we must take risks -- but we must take them. All four Chiefs believe the Chinese will not come in. That's a risk that must be taken. You must give our boys full support. I will support you in any decision you take.

Albert: You and your advisers have my trust.

Arends: You have proven to the world you want peace. Should resume in future, near future.

Fulbright: One comment about Russell that the lull ~~will~~ cost us. It helped us, too, in matter of supply. (McNamara said this didn't matter at all for us.)

Fulbright continued: Concur in Mansfield statement. This is not similar to World Wars I and II. We have never tried to reimpose colonial power on anyone before. We undertook to help France with her colonies. Precedents don't appeal to me. We are in a false position now. We are properly accused of taking the place of the French.

We ought (to find?) a way to negotiate a way out. No possibility of negotiation except with the help of the Russians. Need their help. They could reconvene the Geneva Conference.

Maybe our dialogue with the Russians has been exhausted. If we win, what do we do? Do we stay there forever?

There has never been a war where there has been American discontent like this.

Therefore, I think we should play for time. Nobody believed the Chinese would come in in Korea -- but they did.

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Hope we would not resume the bombing -- and try to find a way out.  
After large casualties, we will come to a negotiation.

President: Perhaps if we took the Majority Leader's paper point by point -- and see what it says.

McNamara:

1. Bombing lull should be continued -- minimize military activity.

At what level should military action be continued to bring peace? At present the lever to negotiations is continued military action. If we adopt the Gavin line, the initiative would pass to the VC. The balance of opinion is that minimal military action would be costly -- and not lead to peace.

Rusk: Under guerrilla action, it is difficult to get a frozen cease fire. We have said to the other side that we will try for a cease fire.

President: We can't get anyone to the table. If you produce them, we'll meet them.

Fulbright: What have the Russians been told?

President: They can't deliver the Hanoi (people?).

(President read letter from Shastri.)

Rusk: At New Delhi the Vice President asked the Russians what they could do. They had nothing to offer.

Russell: Of course, the Russians cannot do anything. They are vying with the Chinese and can't bring any pressure. But the problem is, not to fight this war with one hand behind us. The American people won't stand for it. This is an unpopular war but the people want us to win.

Rusk: We are prepared to rely on the Vietnamese people in free elections. Perhaps the cease fire would cause a little procedural difficulty.

President: We have said we would talk about their four points, but we won't agree to preconditions.

(Fulbright and President had a little exchange about the four points and the Russians. What did we say and vice versa?)

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Boggs: North Vietnam knows they can't run us off. If it were just a localized war, we wouldn't be there. The colonial argument is falacious. They have tried the same thing in Thailand and there is no colonial history in Thailand.

If ever been a demonstration of dedication to law and rule of law, it is what we have been doing.

Decision: a military one. We are going to stay there, and I'm for whatever is necessary to bring an honorable peace. We have made progress in the last six months. And we will defeat them.

Bill Bates: From military standpoint -- support our troops.

Bow: I agree.

Morgan: I'm for resumption of bombing.

Rivers: Senator Russell has stated my position. The American people are afraid of land war in Asia.. We need air protection. We need to stay there. It would be disastrous to leave. The American people will not follow indecision. Win or get out. Let the military select the targets. My Committee will follow you. Be decisive.

President: Always seek counsel of military.

Hickenlooper: If only Vietnam were concerned, I'd get out. But we are confronting the Communist world. Either get out or lick them. I've been restless with our light bombing. If we win, we must take out their ability to make war.

Don't go for this enclave philosophy. It doesn't make sense.

Get out and get ready to fight somewhere else. Or go lick them. It involves risk but all war involves risk. If we are in it to win, resume bombing and win.

Fulbright: If we follow Hickenlooper's advice, it will get us into World War III.

Mahon: In Congress, we have been oversimplifying. We are there for a long time. No easy answer.

I think we ought to resume bombing, but we are oversimplifying. I will follow your leadership.

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Hayden: Proceed promptly to bomb all areas in North Vietnam that contribute to carrying on the war -- and do it quickly.

Long: We get into some trouble by letting the communists believe we are weak. Only way China will keep out is that we'll lick her, too. Unless we let them know we aim to be strong, and to win, we are in for trouble. When the communists take one country, they'll take them all over. Every democratic leader will know he is doomed. All Southeast Asia will fall.

President: Thank all of you. Senator sent me quote: "Never call retreat." Read passage from one page. Disturbed not by differences but by the interpretations placed on these differences by the enemy.

(Picked up an intercept -- read it to the assembly of those present.)

Ready to talk to anyone, at any time. Goldberg has urged U Thant to take any initiative. We have tried to take it to the Security Council.

Appreciate your views. Will take whatever action is necessary. I always keep your resolution in mind. I know you can take it away from me anytime you want, and I can't veto.

Mrs. Bolton: My people feel as I do. We have let our enemies think we wouldn't fight, as we have so many times. We must bear in mind we build an image of cowardice. Can't we fight? Don't let them think we won't fight.

Saltonstall: Keep that resolution in your pocket. We won't take it away from you.

President: I urge you to let me (unreadable) our options by discussing this in the newspapers. Too many lives depend on our security.

I want to discuss with you further my problems. I hope you will not discuss this. At appropriate times, decisions will be made. I want to feel that I can talk Top Secret matters without (their) being divulged.

END OF MEETING

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