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#41 meeting notes	1/27/66 meeting with foreign policy advisors on resumption of bombing <i>sanitized NSC 3-24-21</i> possible classified information 9 p.	1/27/66	A

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Meeting in Cabinet Room
January 27, 1966
Time: 6:20 p.m. - 8:20 p.m.
Subject: Resumption of Bombing

Present: President, McNamara, Rusk, M. Bundy, General Wheeler,
Moyers, Valenti

(From notes by J. Valenti)

Rusk: Nothing to report on diplomatic front. Plane to Hanoi has been delayed from Vientiane.

I can't honestly say I see any taker from the other side. One thin thread that hasn't played its course -- from Souvanna.

President: Did you ask McNamara and Bus Wheeler to see Ayub letter?

Bundy: Yes.

Bundy or Rusk (not clear): From a diplomatic view only, the general reaction to a few days more pause would be good -- balanced off against the military.

Don't know how you... much you think the 15 Senators' view will take hold.

President: What do you recommend?

Rusk: Resume bombing -- but bombing policy be kept under firm control. The dangers of the Chinese coming in.

Very little initiative on part of Viet Cong.

Resume this weekend.

President: What significance do you attach to low level of VC initiative?

Rusk: If it went on longer perhaps it would be significant -- reports are they will draw back to guerrilla type warfare. Perhaps if this continues, we can let our bombing intensity reflect this.

Wheeler: Westmoreland said he is afraid of what is developing in First Corps area. It may be getting ready to mount major effort in northern provinces.

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Also reports of sizeable concentration in Quag Ny (probably Quang Ngai).^s
ROK battalions are there.

Fact there haven't been number of sizeable attacks is meaningless.

Bundy: It is unusual for (so) few attacks so long.

Wheeler: Not so, really.

McNamara: Rate of activity is off since Tet. Don't know why nor will we for at least a week. But they are continuing to reinforce at rapid rate.

President: Don't know "why" -- but the "why" is probably not to our advantage.

McNamara: I agree. Further delay on resumption of bombing can polarize opinion in this country. I feel we should resume -- and send execute order tonight.

President: Does it make any difference if we start on Sunday?

McNamara: No, not really.

Rusk: Senior officers in my Department would vote holding off a while longer. Can't find any solid basis, however, to recommend to you we refrain.

Wheeler: Dean, how much would it take to get a definitive answer from Souvanna's man?

Rusk: Probably a week -- or never.

Bundy: We won't get this man to make any definitive... odds are very long if he came back in a week, he would have anything.

Only reason for prolonging is the low level of VC activity -- and opinion of Ayub and others that it would create confusion on the other side.

Rusk: But with these trucks coming South, how do you justify refraining?

President: What are the latest facts on infiltration?

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(President read report on _____)

(Agreed we would not send execute order until we are absolutely ready to go.)

President ask: 'What's different in bombing on Saturday as compared to Monday?'

McNamara: There's a difference in number of perishable targets. They might be off the roads by Monday.

President: Are we doing any good on our bombing in South Vietnam and Laos?

McNamara: Yes, we are. Running 1900 sorties a week in Laos.

Wheeler: In area just opposite Laos, in the Delta area, destroyed 5 trucks, took our anti-aircraft plus others. This is the only day we haven't had a secondary explosion.

Rusk: Can planes going to Laos bring bombs back?

Wheeler: Yes, they can bring bombs back. They don't like to bring ordnance back to carriers.

McNamara: Cable came in saying operations have been limited by bomb shortage. Laotian planes...

Wheeler: But the cable didn't make sense --

McNamara: Cable came out of meeting in Bangkok -- of a meeting of military personnel. Sent out cable saying I wasn't informed of any shortage in bombs.

Only shortage is 750 pound (bombs) used on B-52s. Nobody is right mind thought we'd drop these bombs in B-52 on Vietnam. But we are working hard on this.

President: What's wrong with Ridgeway?

Wheeler: He's probably bitten by bug that we should never get involved in land war in Asia.

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President: Do you think our failure to bomb the North will materially affect the balance out there?

Wheeler: Yes, Sir. We should decrease by every pound we can to stop movement of supplies. In interdiction, you start at the beginning and go all the way through to finally stopping it in country. Is like stopping water after it comes out of the hose.

President: What are we cutting off?

Wheeler: We hit the power plant. Hitting LOC (lines of communication)-- and have raised the cost to them of moving supplies southward. We cannot apply interdiction to stop the supply of troops they are supplying today -- about 80 tons/a day. But we can stop the supplying of a larger force.

McNamara: This is a very important question but I'm not sure of the figures. They need up to 80 tons to supply them -- but if they increase troops they will need 165 tons but they have capabilities of 200 tons a day. But these figures are very rough. Our Air Force has learned all over again to do (unreadable) bombing. There is much to learn...

President: We really pay a price -- if we are not getting a payoff.

(Either Wheeler or McNamara): We know it is costing them -- and to feel pain. But I cannot tell you today that our bombing will cut down their operations in the South.

Rusk: Purpose of bombing ought to directly help our troops and break the will of the other fellow. My own priority would be to concentrate on operational connections in the South.

President: When you go back in here, Dean, we're going to have to go in closer -- and do more risky bombing than we have before. You could sell that the other night.

Are we getting closer to danger points by resuming our bombing -- and shoving it -- or by not resuming it?

McNamara: By resuming, we increase military action with Communist China (presume he meant risk of military action). We must seek to avoid this at all costs. The burden is on us. Some of the programs recommended cause excessive risk.

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If we don't resume the risk is more political than military. I personally think this is a high risk.

The CIA estimators feel this way.

Bundy: All estimators say that cessation will strengthen the will of the enemy.

McNamara: People in this country believe that supplies will (unreadable) and we protect our boys.

President: Did we make a mistake in starting to bomb in the North?

McNamara: No.

Bundy: I share the view that we don't need to take the suggestions of those around the table the other night. We never said we would bomb cities.

(Either McNamara or Wheeler): I must take some. I agree with the political argument. But I think it is important to bomb militarily.

We never had a heavy enough interdiction program. It has to be heavy. Day after day. We have had only 86 a day. Nothing at night. Now we can do a better job at night.

POL is absolutely vital to interdiction.

Wheeler: But the problem is not the (either 55 or 155) battalions they will have; it's what they could have if we allow them to continue supplying. The only industrial target is the (unreadable) works in Hanoi. We ought to take that out.

But we need to expand our interdiction campaign.

President: Will that materially increase the danger of pulling China in by increasing bombing program?

Wheeler: Highest possible danger is if we make amphibious landing in North Vietnam. I could be wrong but I don't believe it. Don't think the Soviets will get involved.

McNamara: Don't think we know how many sorties we need to stop the flow of supplies. We could actually quadruple intensity on certain targets. We

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need more facts.

President: Do we need another 35 days of pause to get them?

McNamara: This has nothing to do with resuming bombing.

President: What have we lost during these 35 days? What are we getting out of these bombings? What reports do we get out of North Vietnam?

Rusk:

We ought to hit only those targets directly involved in support of troops.

President: Who are people in your Department -- their background -- and what are their reasons for not resuming?

Rusk: Ball, Thompson. Thompson wants at least two more weeks -- to confuse each other. Each of the enemy is afraid to get caught laying down their commitment. Thompson is concerned about Russian involvement.

Bundy: His fundamental point is that Russians know they have a constraining influence on us.

President: Doesn't it worry you that Russia might heat up the world somewhere else?

McNamara: No. I think Russians are less a risk than China. And we are strong enough to handle other commitments. I don't agree (that) Senator Russell is right.

Wheeler: I think we are strong enough.

McNamara: He may be saying this in context of being a world policeman.

Rusk: Bill Bundy is ready to go -- but is worried over the Souvanna thing.

President: What will U Thant say?

Rusk: Some danger. U Thant will say "too bad". Negotiations were in progress and they could have worked.

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Goldberg and Sisco are hoping for holding off. Harriman would be more comfortable with some more time.

President: What is the logic of Goldberg's position of three weeks more?

Bundy: He says no damage militarily. Makes no claim that we would get peace.

President: Does he want to pull out?

Bundy: No. He wants to compromise it out.

President: But the only way to get a fellow to talk to you is to show strength. To show daring and imagination and find a way to get to the table.

Are we doing any good playing with the Viet Cong?

Bundy: VC never said they would sit down and talk about prisoners. The door was slammed in our face.

Rusk: It's true we can give wrong decisions to Hanoi. But we don't know what they would do with the right signal.

Bundy: One thing the bombing has done is to serve as an umbrella for 200,000 men.

President: I think if you stop bombing they will go for something else. If you let them run you out of the front yard, they'll run you out of the house.

I don't want war with Russia or China. I feel less comfortable tonight than I felt last night. I don't want to back out -- and look like I'm reacting to the Fulbrights.

We must realize the price we pay for going back in. We will lose a good part of the Senate. I thought of checking that resolution back to them.

Do we want to take on the Senators -- or let others take them on?

McNamara: I think the longer we delay the more controversy we produce.

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Bundy: We ought to be sure we hit only trucks and highways until later.

President: We don't have anyone defending us.

Bundy: Yes, that's right, and we don't have anyone of stature.

President: Douglas could do it. He's got the standing to do it.

What I don't have is evidence.

-- Turn loose 115 nations and having them shout at us. Suppose we would not announce a resumption. We would keep the nations off us. Can we take this same firepower and use it in the South?

McNamara: Why wouldn't we better off applying all the sorties in the South?

One, we don't need them in South Vietnam.

Two, are we using them in Laos? I don't know. They are blind bombing and I'm sure we are getting benefit from this.

President: We have to be sure -- we must be sure.

McNamara: I am sure we need to resume bombing.

President: What did Bobby say?

McNamara: He says the burden of proof is on us.

President: What will he say when we resume?

McNamara: I don't know. I'll see him 10:30 Saturday morning.

President: I think we'll carry a big burden when (we) resume with the Senate, peace lovers, Ministers, etc.

McNamara: We cannot use the same firepower elsewhere. I can prove that.

President: I don't think we have the case made to resume bombing. What will the papers say?

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What I think we ought to do is to be prepared with statements^{PM} -- let the S
(unreadable) men chase it around.

Ought to talk to all the people we need to talk to Saturday.

And will send order -- prefer Monday.

McNamara: Will do it so it will be announced on Tuesday.

END OF NOTES